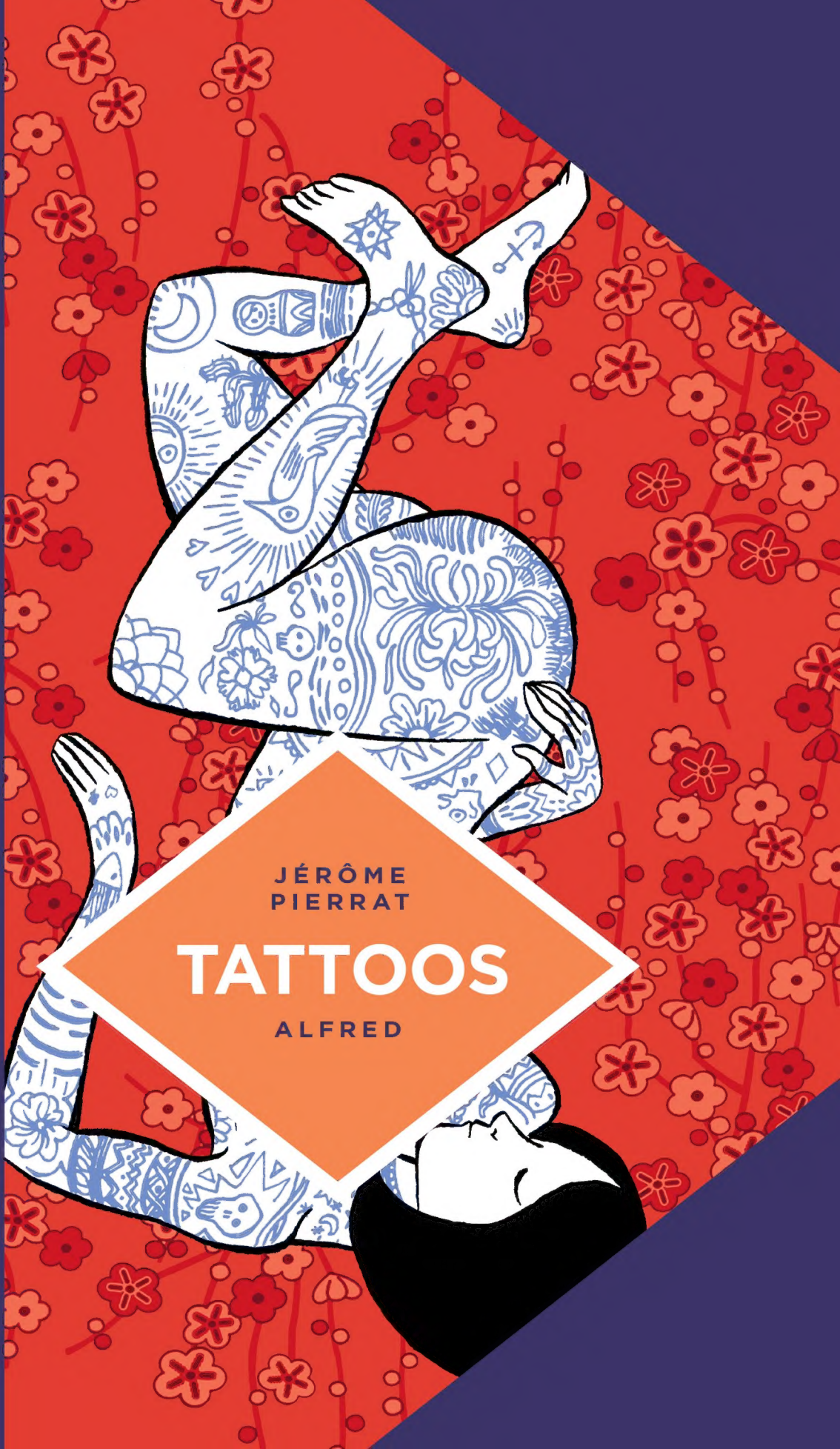

THE LITTLE BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE

THE LITTLE BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE:

TATTOOS

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FOREWORD

A HELLO KITTY TATTOO

In late spring 2014, the quiet little British seaside town of Whitstable in northeast Kent saw a banner go up over an empty storefront advertising the imminent opening of "My First Tattoo: Britain's first tattoo parlour for kids!" It was the work of one Sadie Hennessy, an artist whose name had, till then, been known only in limited circles. But no sooner did the banner appear than the English media pounced on it. The international press followed suit. Photos of Sadie Hennessy posing in front of her boutique proliferated. A poster in the shop window behind her featured a few close-ups of cute tattoos, mostly franchise cartoon characters including Hello Kitty, Snoopy, and Tinkerbell. Under the words "Coming Soon" was a list of ideal occasions for having your child tattooed: birthdays, baptisms, bar mitzvahs... Wrapping it all up like a punchline was the slogan: "A gift for life at pocket money prices!" Parents whose children had never been tattooed before were encouraged to use the code "ART" for a 20% discount.

Pictures of the storefront soon made their way around the world. Some news outlets, shocked by the idea, expressed their outrage; others reported the story without much ado, seeing in the whole affair just another sign of our times. But Sadie Hennessy soon revealed her intentions behind the project: it was all a hoax, a joke meant to make people think about "our children growing up too fast" and becoming sexualized.

However, Hennessy was surprised to receive a number of genuine inquiries from parents right off the bat.

AN UNPRECEDENTED DEMOCRATIZATION

While tattooing our kids might not yet be a widespread practice, tattoos these days are available around the world, in any major city or at any significant cultural event. Studios, salons, boutiques, booths, traveling shops... you can get a tattoo wherever you want. Historians and sociologists have studied the issue and agree on this much: in the decades ahead, tattooists and tattooees will only grow more common. Perhaps one day, if new painkilling techniques are invented, actual tattoo parlors for children will see the light of day without causing any uproar.

In order to meet such a steady demand for bodily markings, the tattoo market has expanded so quickly that anthropologists have had a hard time catching up and gauging the extent of its reach. The youth market, which might seem a natural extension, is of course a new development.[1]

THE HARDY PHENOMENON

For a long time, tattoo artists plied a roving trade, moving around with circuses and carnivals, or offering their services illegally on the street, in bars, and aboard ships. The first tattoo parlors actually date from the end of the 19th century.[2] They all started out in major port cities—New York, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Hamburg, Copenhagen—or else

in cities easily reached by rivers and waterways, like London. These parlors were largely frequented by sailors and usually in the back rooms of seedy taverns.

Tattoo parlors as we know them today—which is to say, a shop offering all comers, by appointment, not merely a selection of pre-drawn designs (known as a tattoo flash) to pick from, but all sorts of unique and personalized designs—are actually fairly recent. For example, when Don Ed Hardy opened Realistic Tattoo in San Francisco in 1974, it was one of the first of its kind in the United States.

Born in 1945, California native Don Ed Hardy is a veritable living legend, still one of the most famous American tattoo artists: the first to graduate from an art school, the first to introduce a truly modern and artistic dimension to the discipline. His tattoos, based around skulls, hearts, dice, and playing cards, are instantly recognizable. They've made their way around the world and, since the early 2000s, when Don Ed Hardy licensed his brand to several clothing lines, they've been widely spotted on everything from t-shirts to sneakers, pumps to purses, and cans of energy drinks. His designs got even more exposure when Christian Audigier, famous fashion designer and friend to the stars, seized upon the tattooist's style to create the Ed Hardy brand.[3] No sooner did pop star Madonna don an Ed Hardy t-shirt and ball cap in the mid-2000s, than the popularity of the tattoo artist's pioneering graphics increased exponentially worldwide. From New York to Yangon by way of Djibouti, there was no place left on earth his designs hadn't reached.[4]

A RITE OF FASHION

As Jérôme Pierrat explains to us in the history you hold in your hands, tattooing as a practice is ancient.[5] For centuries upon centuries, humans have tattooed each other for social, political, and religious reasons. But in the last fifteen years or so, tattooing has become a fashion

phenomenon of unheard-of proportions. Nor does this trend seem likely to end anytime soon. Sociologist David Le Breton has even suggested that it's already gone far beyond a mere fad: "The tidal wave of tattooing in the last fifteen years has been such that we can no longer speak of it as a fashion craze." He goes on to add that we are now facing a "genuine cultural revolution.[6]" In our day, an individual's decision to get a tattoo is first and foremost driven by a desire to distinguish themselves from the crowd through an aesthetic marking. "Paul Valéry had a profound idea," wrote Gilles Deleuze, "what is most deep is the skin.[7]"

THE PASSAGE THROUGH PAIN

Through techniques like the epidural, humans have managed to give the lie to such divine pronouncements as when the Lord said unto Eve: "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children.[8]" Modern tattooing techniques, however, are still just as painful as the older ones ever were. People getting tattoos today feel just as much pain as did our ancestors. But make no mistake: this pain, this temporary suffering, was and still is probably part of what makes the process feel like a rite of passage or initiation.[9] And if the reasons that lead people to get tattoos are many and often still mysterious, and the image they wind up getting is sometimes impersonal, decorative, or meaningless, tattoos continue to be, especially for young people, a way of constructing one's own identity. Their symbolic importance must not be underestimated.

David Vandermeulen

NOTES

1. Ever since the early '80s, Jérôme Pierrat, editor-in-chief of *Tatouage Magazine*, has enjoyed a privileged vantage on the spread of tattooing in France. He's noticed that the number of pro tattoo artists has quintupled over the last 25 years.

2. The very first official tattoo parlor, Tattoo Shop, was opened in New York in 1846 by Martin Hildebrandt, formerly a traveling tattooist of German descent. But the real boom took place from 1890 to 1930.

3. Actually, Hardy's true talent lay in his reappropriation of Japanese tatooing. Classic 19th century motifs like skulls and gambling paraphernalia represent but a very small part of his oeuvre. By choosing to focus on this single facet of Hardy's production for the needs of his brand, Audigier deliberately reduced and simplified a much more personal and significant body of work.

4. In fact, its spread surpassed even that of work produced by the Westwood-McLaren duo. In 1974, when Vivienne Westwood dressed the New York Dolls (and then, two years later, the Sex Pistols) from her little underground boutique on Kings Road, she never imagined that one day her work, like Don Ed Hardy's, would literally infect all of pop culture. In less than 40 years, the punk dress code she'd established (straps, torn clothing, safety pins, plaid, leopardskin, and Union Jack patterns) spread as far and wide as Hardy's tattoos, through every part of the fashion industry from haute couture to mass-produced, off-the-rack brands. It is interesting to note that in both these cases, the designers' names—Westwood, McLaren, Ed Hardy—have remained less well-known to the general public than those of the celebrities that popularized their work.

5. Bruno Cuzzicoli, France's first tattoo artist, recalled how historians came to date the first traces of tattooing from the distant past: "Tattoos consist primarily of carbon, which does not decompose at the same rate as flesh. Long after a body is buried, tattoos can be found, deposited on the skeleton in a fine layer, as can be seen in places where bodies were buried naked. If few people among us today seem aware of this fact, that's probably because rotting clothes destroyed the tattoo."

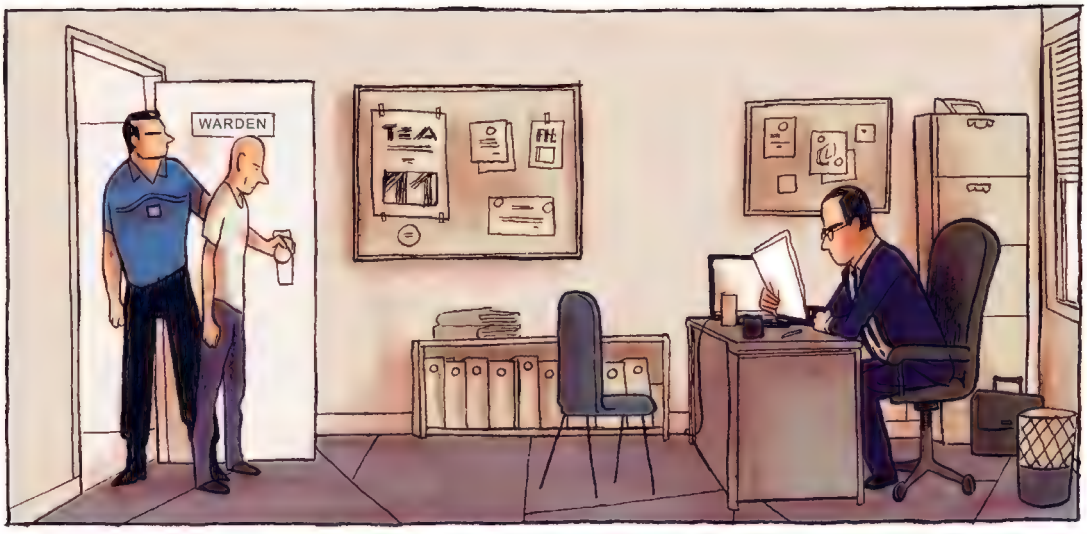
6. Interview with David Le Breton in *Le Figaro*, July 7, 2014.

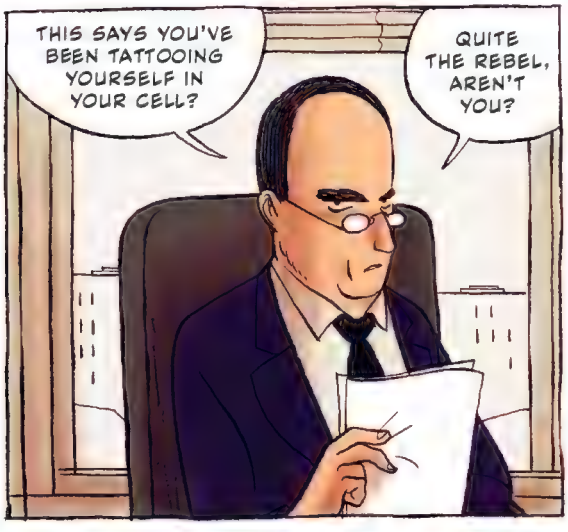
7. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester w/Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin Boundas. p. 10. The Athlone Press: London, 1990. *La logique du sens*, p.20, Minuit: Paris, 1982. Deleuze is referring to Valéry's famous line: "Man is only man on the surface." « (Cahier B — 1910, p.39), which Valéry took up again in L'Idée fixe: "The deepest part of a man is his skin." (Oeuvres II, p.215), Bibliothèque de la Pléiade Gallimard: Paris, 1960.

8. Genesis 3:16 (New International Version).

9. Also of note is that increasingly effective, increasingly popular laser tattoo removal techniques are even more painful than the process of getting a tattoo.

KNOCK KNOCK
COME IN!
MAISON D'ARRÊT
HOMMES


WARDEN
TEA

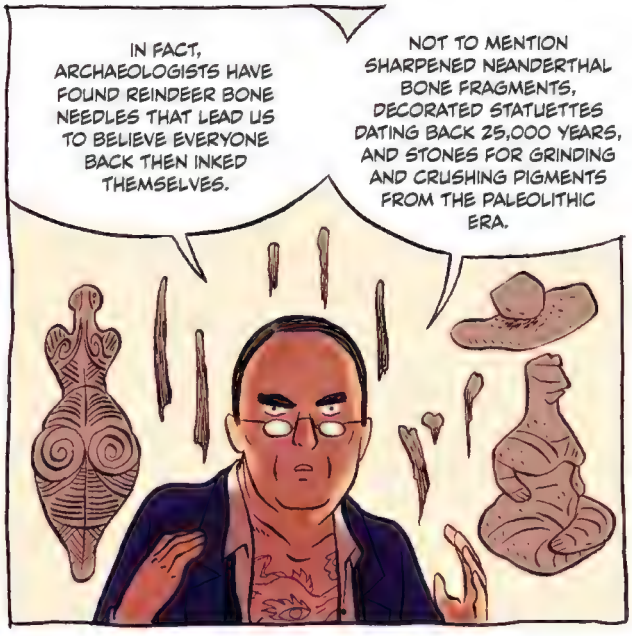

THIS SAYS YOU'VE BEEN TATTOOING YOURSELF IN YOUR CELL?
QUITE THE REBEL, AREN'T YOU?

A POET, TOO, I SEE...
...AND A BAD SPELLER.
DETH TO KOPS

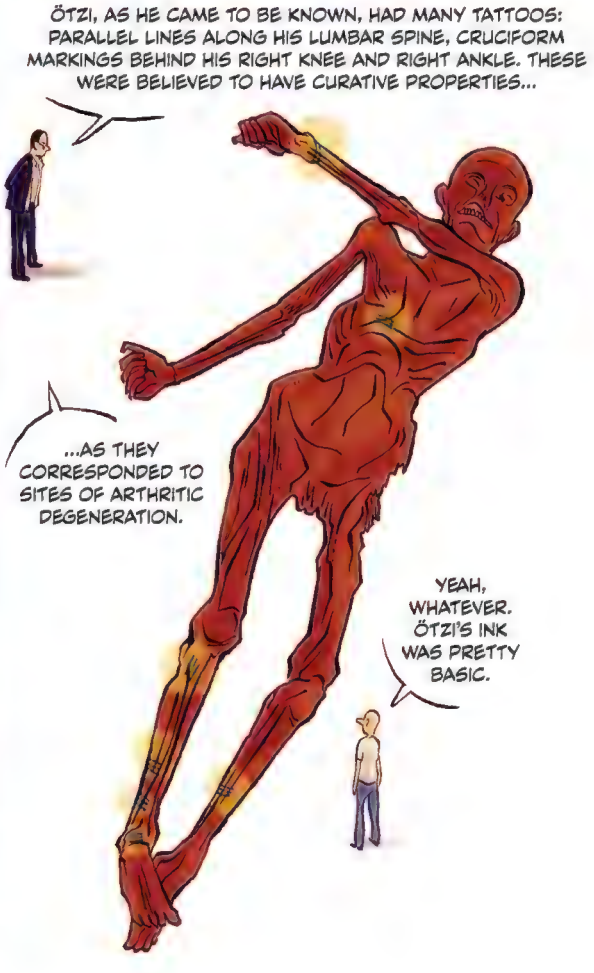
SO YOU THINK YOU'RE TOUGH, GUY? WELL, I'VE GOT YOU BEAT!
TATS AREN'T JUST FOR GANGSTERS ANYMORE!

INSTEAD OF TWO HOURS IN THE COOLER...
YOU'RE GOING TO SPEND THE NEXT HOUR IN HERE, LISTENING TO ME.
HAVE A SEAT!

NO, MY YOUNG FRIEND... TATTOOS WEREN'T INVENTED BY GANGSTERS, MUCH LESS PUNKS.
THEY'VE BEEN AROUND SINCE YOUR EARLIEST FOREBEARS!


IN FACT, ARCHAEOLOGISTS HAVE FOUND REINDEER BONE NEEDLES THAT LEAD US TO BELIEVE EVERYONE BACK THEN INKED THEMSELVES.
NOT TO MENTION SHARPENED NEANDERTHAL BONE FRAGMENTS, DECORATED STATUETTES DATING BACK 25,000 YEARS, AND STONES FOR GRINDING AND CRUSHING PIGMENTS FROM THE PALEOLITHIC ERA.

BUT THIS MUCH IS CERTAIN: THE OLDEST KNOWN TATTOO IS OVER 5300 YEARS OLD.
IN 1991, A PAIR OF GERMAN TOURISTS CAME UPON THE BODY OF A HUNTER IN A GLACIER ON THE AUSTRIAN-ITALIAN BORDER.


ÖTZI, AS HE CAME TO BE KNOWN, HAD MANY TATTOOS: PARALLEL LINES ALONG HIS LUMBAR SPINE, CRUCIFORM MARKINGS BEHIND HIS RIGHT KNEE AND RIGHT ANKLE. THESE WERE BELIEVED TO HAVE CURATIVE PROPERTIES...
...AS THEY CORRESPONDED TO SITES OF ARTHRITIC DEGENERATION.
YEAH, WHATEVER. ÖTZI'S INK WAS PRETTY BASIC.

THE SCYTHIANS WERE NOMADIC WARRIORS WHO LIVED IN THE HIGH ALTAI PART OF SIBERIA, 500 BCE.

THEIR KINGS BOASTED FANTASTICAL CREATURES IN OUTLANDISH POSTURES ON THEIR BODIES—AND IN COLOR, TOO!

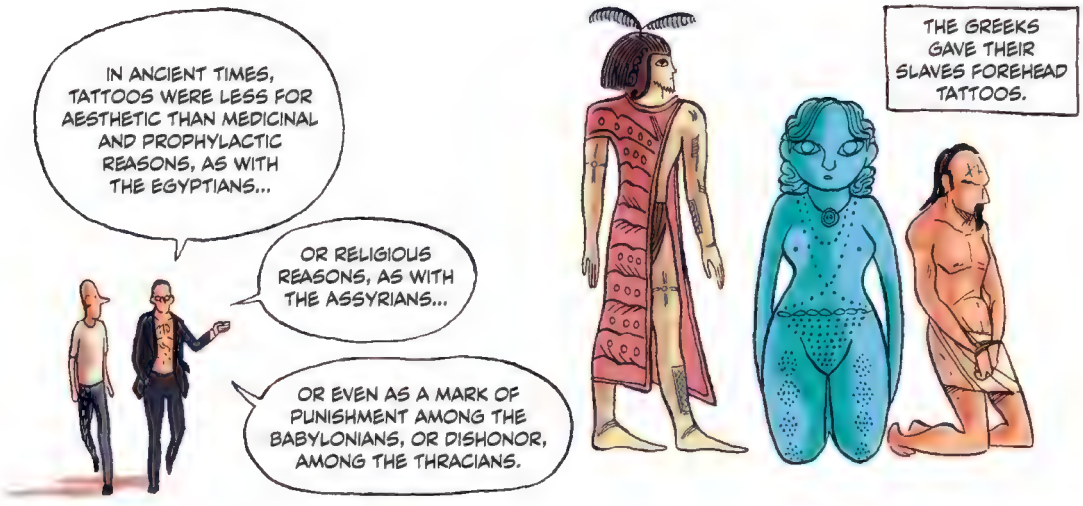
ACCORDING TO HERODOTUS, THEIR INTENSE USE OF CANNABIS AND OTHER HALLUCINATORY DRUGS HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT.

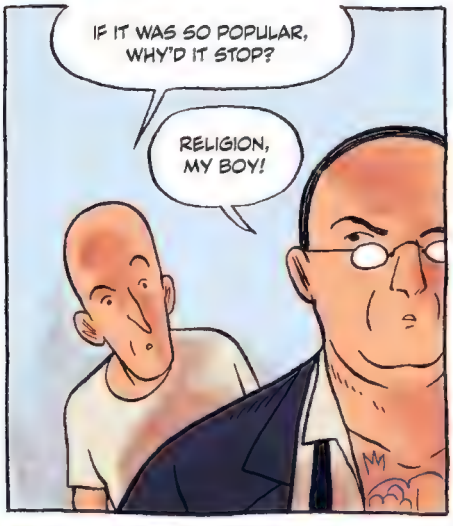
DON'T GO FOLLOWING THEIR LEAD.

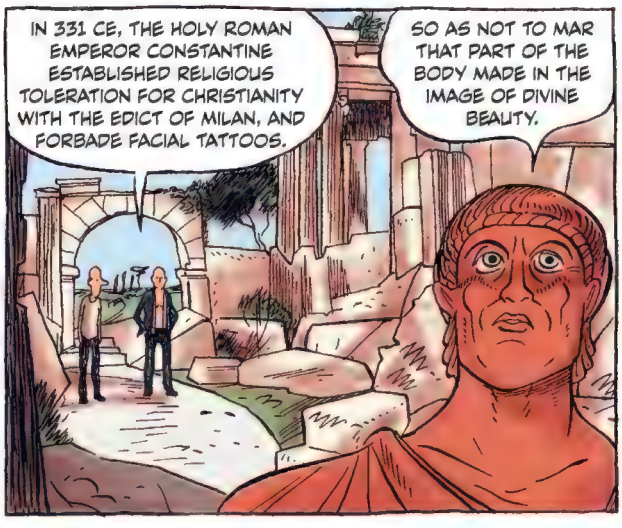
TATTOOS WERE FASHIONABLE IN ANTIQUITY. THE SCYTHIANS WEREN'T THE ONLY ONES TO INK THEMSELVES. AMONG THE TWO HUNDRED CELTIC TRIBES IN EUROPE, MANY PRACTICED TATTOOING.

THE BEST-KNOWN ARE THE PICTS—FROM THE LATIN FOR "PAINTED"—AND THEIR NEIGHBORS THE SCOTS. THEY USED THEIR TATTOOS TO FRIGHTEN THE ROMAN LEGIONARIES WHO TURNED UP THERE IN 55 BCE.

NOT TO MENTION THE GERMANS. IN 98 BCE, THE HISTORIAN TACITUS WROTE THAT THEY HAD A "Y" TATTOOED ON THEIR FOREHEAD, AS OPPOSED TO THEIR SAXON NEIGHBORS, WHO WORE AN "I."

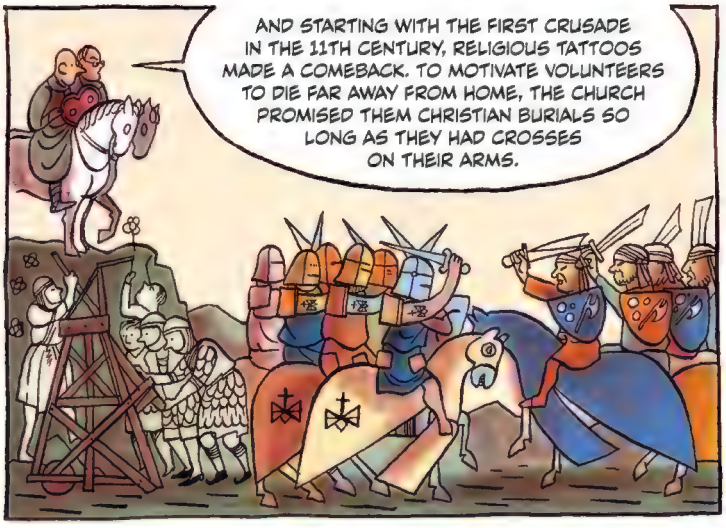

IN ANCIENT TIMES, TATTOOS WERE LESS FOR AESTHETIC THAN MEDICINAL AND PROPHYLACTIC REASONS, AS WITH THE EGYPTIANS...
OR RELIGIOUS REASONS, AS WITH THE ASSYRIANS...
OR EVEN AS A MARK OF PUNISHMENT AMONG THE BABYLONIANS, OR DISHONOR, AMONG THE THRACIANS.
THE GREEKS GAVE THEIR SLAVES FOREHEAD TATTOOS.


IF IT WAS SO POPULAR, WHY'D IT STOP?
RELIGION, MY BOY!

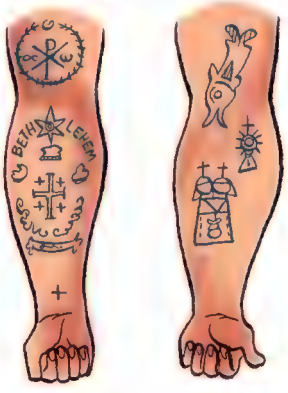

IN 331 CE, THE HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR CONSTANTINE ESTABLISHED RELIGIOUS TOLERATION FOR CHRISTIANITY WITH THE EDICT OF MILAN, AND FORBADE FACIAL TATTOOS.
SO AS NOT TO MAR THAT PART OF THE BODY MADE IN THE IMAGE OF DIVINE BEAUTY.

THE SECOND COUNCIL OF NICAEA IN 787 CE BANNED TATTOOING COMPLETELY AS A PAGAN PRACTICE.
WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MARKS MADE TO HONOR GOD.

FOR IN THE EAST, NEW CONVERTS DID NOT HESITATE TO ADORN THEIR BODIES WITH SYMBOLS OF THEIR FAITH: CROSSES, BUT ALSO FISH.

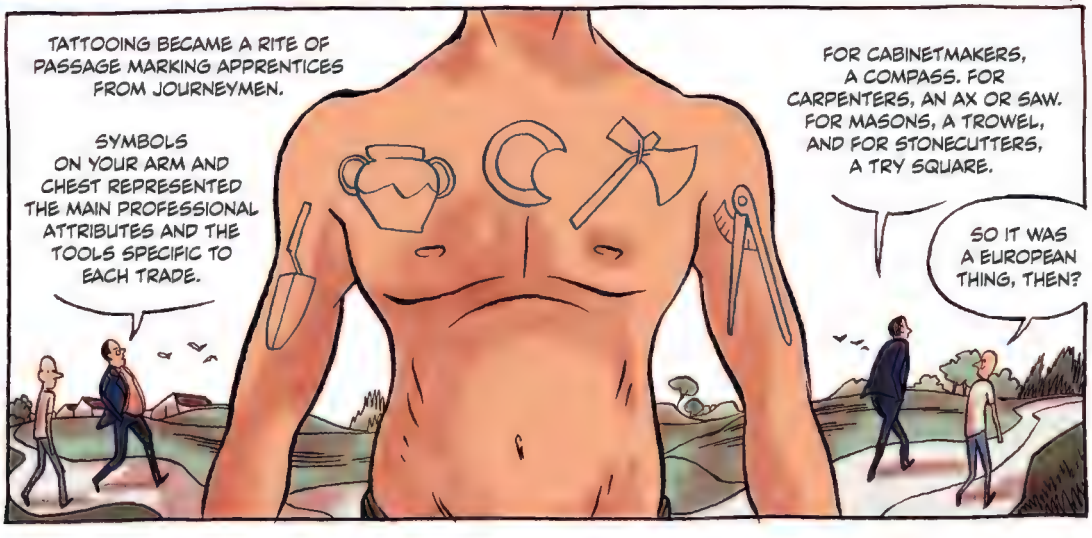

AND STARTING WITH THE FIRST CRUSADE IN THE 11TH CENTURY, RELIGIOUS TATTOOS MADE A COMEBACK. TO MOTIVATE VOLUNTEERS TO DIE FAR AWAY FROM HOME, THE CHURCH PROMISED THEM CHRISTIAN BURIALS SO LONG AS THEY HAD CROSSES ON THEIR ARMS.

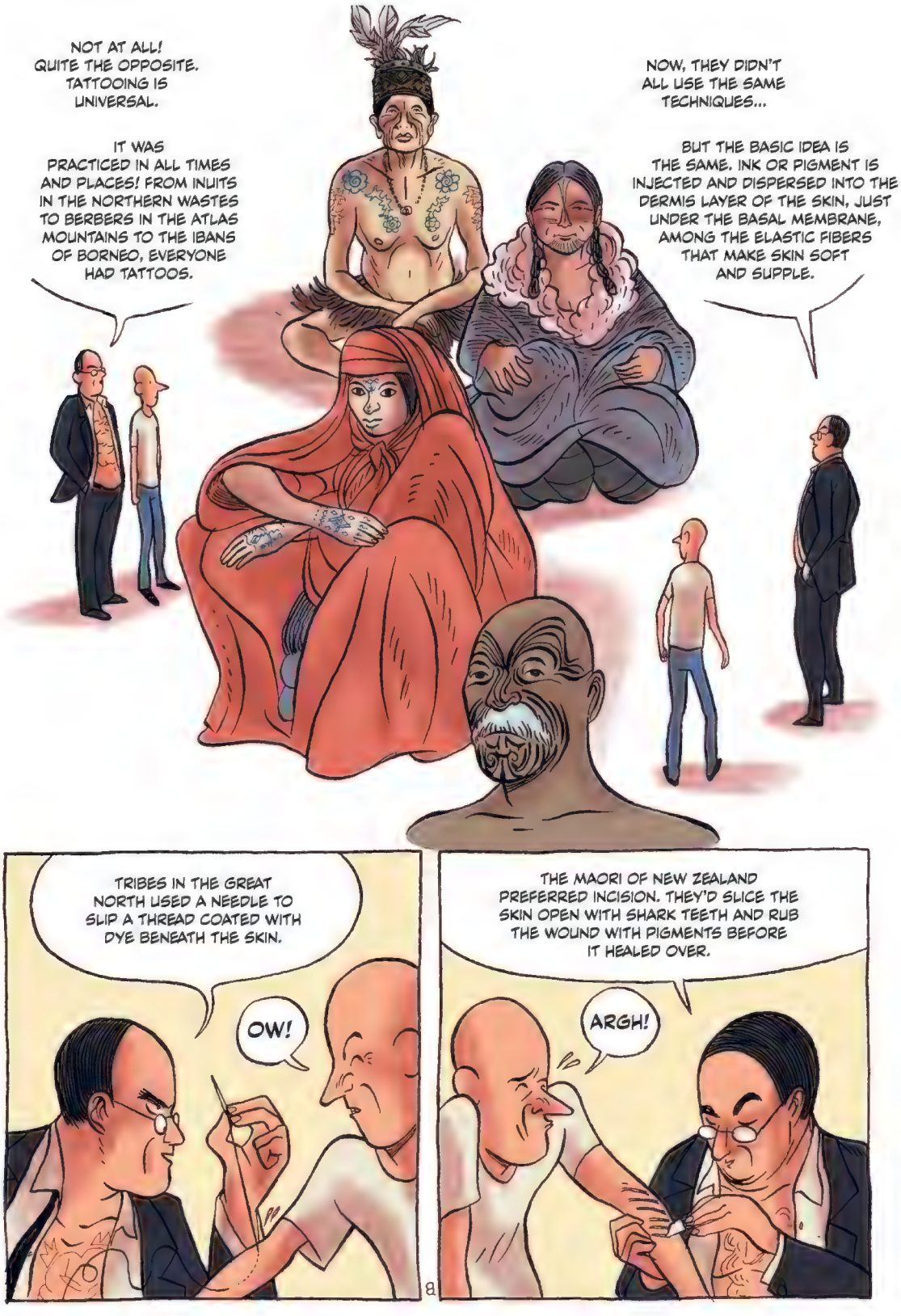
PILGRIMS FOLLOWED SUIT, GETTING TATTOOS IN JERUSALEM, BETHLEHEM, OR THE BASILICA DELLA SANTA CASA IN ITALY, TO BRING BACK PROOF OF THEIR JOURNEY.



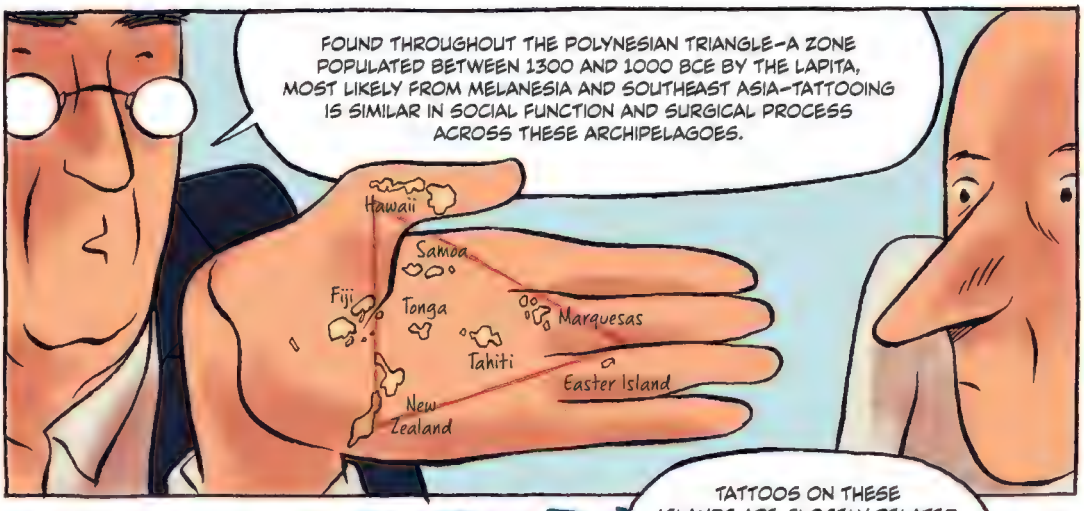
DESPITE RELIGIOUS PROHIBITION, TATTOOS NEVER COMPLETELY DISAPPEARED. FROM THE MIDDLE AGES ALL THE WAY TO THE REVOLUTION, WORKERS AND ARTISANS IN VARIOUS GUILDS EACH HAD THEIR OWN TATTOOS.
SUCH THAT, FROM THE 14TH CENTURY ONWARD, JOURNEYMEN IN VARIOUS TRADES RECOGNIZED EACH OTHER FROM THEIR TATTOOS.

7.


TATTOOING BECAME A RITE OF PASSAGE MARKING APPRENTICES FROM JOURNEYMEN.
SYMBOLS ON YOUR ARM AND CHEST REPRESENTED THE MAIN PROFESSIONAL ATTRIBUTES AND THE TOOLS SPECIFIC TO EACH TRADE.
FOR CABINETMAKERS, A COMPASS. FOR CARPENTERS, AN AX OR SAW. FOR MASONS, A TROWEL, AND FOR STONECUTTERS, A TRY SQUARE.
SO IT WAS A EUROPEAN THING, THEN?


NOT AT ALL! QUITE THE OPPOSITE. TATTOOING IS UNIVERSAL.
IT WAS PRACTICED IN ALL TIMES AND PLACES! FROM INUITS IN THE NORTHERN WASTES TO BERBERS IN THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS TO THE IBANS OF BORNEO, EVERYONE HAD TATTOOS.
NOW, THEY DIDN'T ALL USE THE SAME TECHNIQUES...
BUT THE BASIC IDEA IS THE SAME. INK OR PIGMENT IS INJECTED AND DISPERSED INTO THE DERMIS LAYER OF THE SKIN, JUST UNDER THE BASAL MEMBRANE, AMONG THE ELASTIC FIBERS THAT MAKE SKIN SOFT AND SUPPLE.
TRIBES IN THE GREAT NORTH USED A NEEDLE TO SLIP A THREAD COATED WITH DYE BENEATH THE SKIN.
OW!
THE MAORI OF NEW ZEALAND PREFERRED INCISION. THEY'D SLICE THE SKIN OPEN WITH SHARK TEETH AND RUB THE WOUND WITH PIGMENTS BEFORE IT HEALED OVER.
ARGH!

BUT MOST PEOPLE DO IT LIKE YOU, WITH A NEEDLE.
THREE NEEDLES TIED TOGETHER, AND LAMPBLACK MADE FROM MELTING YOGURT CUPS?
CLOSE.
THROUGHOUT THE POLYNESIAN TRIANGLE, APART FROM NEW ZEALAND, THEY USE COMBS.
YOU'RE BEING UNCLEAR...
THEY CARVE AN ANIMAL BONE OR MARINE IVORY INTO A VERY FINE-TOOTHED COMB, AND TIE IT ON THE END OF A STICK, LIKE A LITTLE RAKE. THEN THEY HIT THE COMB WITH A SMALL WOODEN MALLET TO PIERCE THE SKIN. AN ASSISTANT STRETCHES THE SKIN TIGHT, WIPES THE BLOOD AWAY, AND TENDS TO THE PERSON BEING TATTOOED.
TAK!
THAT MUST TAKE FOREVER. BUT I GUESS BACK THEN THEY HAD TIME TO SPARE... JUST LIKE US CONS.
THE ACT GAVE RISE TO ALL SORTS OF PURIFICATION RITUALS, FOR COMING INTO CONTACT WITH BLOOD WAS TABOO.
TATTOOS WERE NEVER FINISHED ALL AT ONCE. IT WAS AN ORDEAL. EVERY RITE OF PASSAGE IN LIFE HAD ITS OWN MARKINGS. WHEN YOU BECAME AN ADULT, YOU GOT A WARRIOR'S "MEDAL": A SYMBOL OF COURAGE, A SIGN YOU'D JOINED THE GROUP, AN IDENTIFYING MARK.
IT COST A LOT. THE TATTOOIST HAD TO BE REMUNERATED: OFTEN IN CLOTH, WEAPONS, BRAIDS...
SO IT WAS A THING FOR RICH PEOPLE.
YES. THE "ARISTOCRACY," SO TO SPEAK. THE UPPER CLASSES, AT ANY RATE.


FOUND THROUGHOUT THE POLYNESIAN TRIANGLE–A ZONE POPULATED BETWEEN 1300 AND 1000 BCE BY THE LAPITA, MOST LIKELY FROM MELANESIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA–TATTOOING IS SIMILAR IN SOCIAL FUNCTION AND SURGICAL PROCESS ACROSS THESE ARCHIPELAGOES.
Hawaii
Samoa
Fiji
Tonga
Marquesas
Tahiti
Easter Island
New Zealand

TATTOOS ON THESE ISLANDS ARE CLOSELY RELATED IN DESIGN, MOTIF, AND SYMBOLISM, EVEN IF EACH ISLAND HAS UNIQUE ASPECTS.

MARQUESAN TATTOOS ARE CONSIDERED THE MOST ACCOMPLISHED AND SOPHISTICATED.

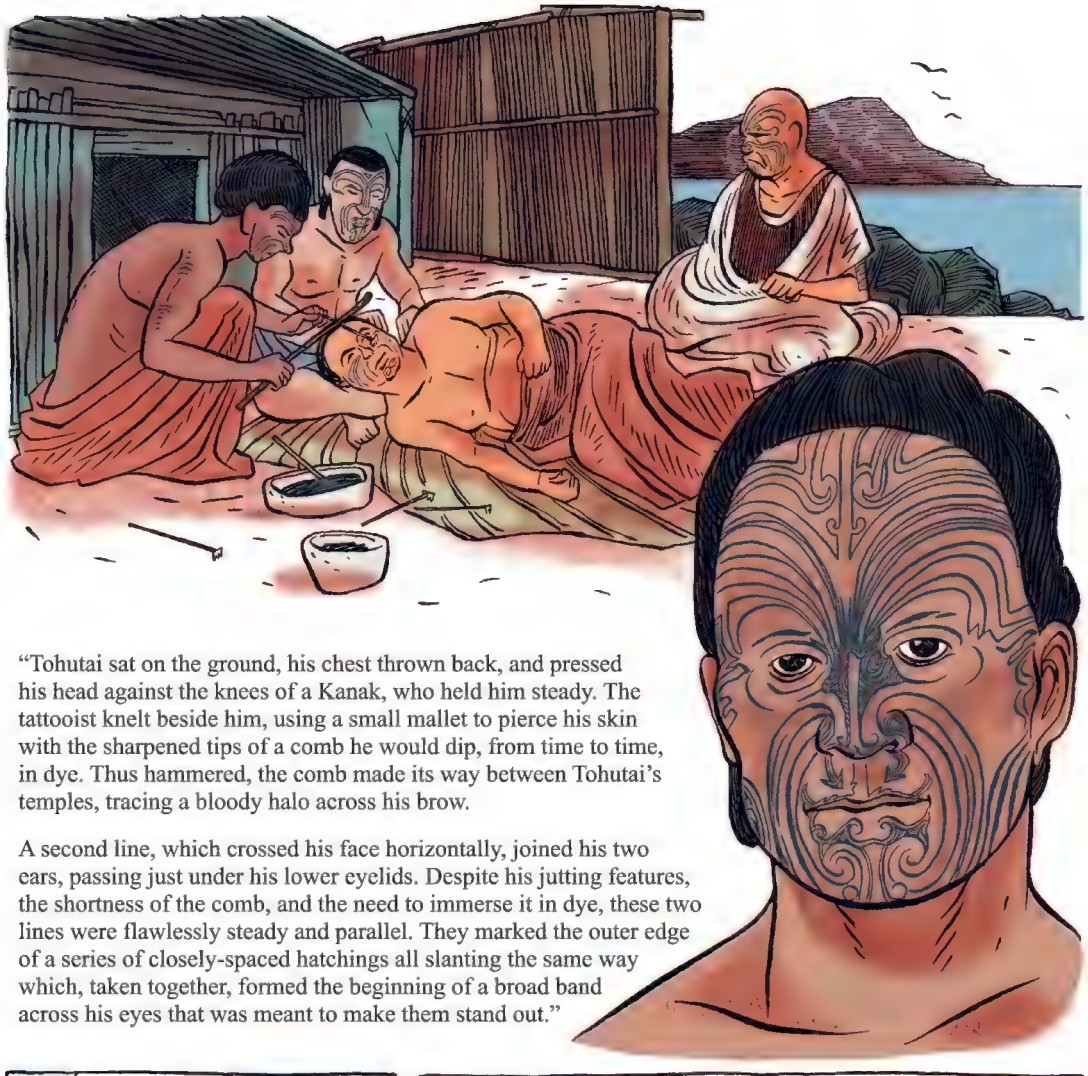
OBSERVERS HAVE CATALOGUED MORE THAN 400 MOTIFS.

THESE INCLUDE THE TIKI, THE FIGURE OF A DEIFIED ANCESTOR. EVERY FEATURE IS STYLIZED AND REPRESENTED IN THE TATTOO.

THE WHORLS OF THE EARS, THE CURVE OF THE ARMS... EYES DEPICTED SEPARATELY OR JOINED.

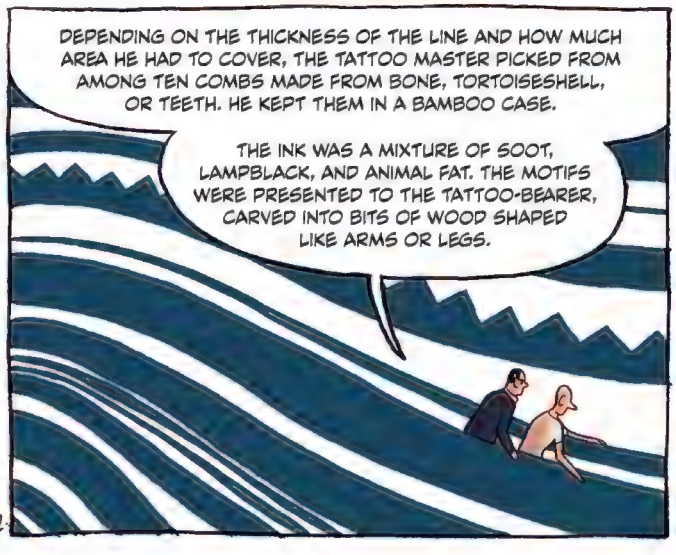
OTHER MOTIFS REPRESENT ANIMALS LIKE THE LIZARD (MO'O), TATTOOED ON THE FACES OF HIGH-RANKING MEN, OR THE TURTLE (KEA).
NOT TO MENTION SEA CREATURES LIKE RAYS, CRABS, AND FLORA, OF COURSE: PLANTS, FRUITS...
AS WELL AS SCENES OF DOMESTIC LIFE OR THE TATTOO-BEARER'S PROFESSION.
HIGH-RANKING MEN GOT TATTOOS ON THEIR FACE FIRST, THEN WORKED DOWNWARD TOWARD THE FEET. FOR THE LOWER CLASSES, IT WAS THE OPPOSITE.

LISTEN UP, I'M GOING TO READ SOMETHING TO YOU.
NO GRUMBLING, NOW!
IN *THE LAST OF THE SAVAGES*, MAX RADIGUET TELLS THE STORY OF A YOUNG MARQUESAN CHIEFTAIN, WHO GETS TATTOOED BY A CERTAIN TUHUNA PATU TIKI, A MASTER SPECIALIST IN TATTOOING, AN ART PASSED DOWN FROM FATHER TO SON.



"Tohutai sat on the ground, his chest thrown back, and pressed his head against the knees of a Kanak, who held him steady. The tattooist knelt beside him, using a small mallet to pierce his skin with the sharpened tips of a comb he would dip, from time to time, in dye. Thus hammered, the comb made its way between Tohutai's temples, tracing a bloody halo across his brow.

A second line, which crossed his face horizontally, joined his two ears, passing just under his lower eyelids. Despite his jutting features, the shortness of the comb, and the need to immerse it in dye, these two lines were flawlessly steady and parallel. They marked the outer edge of a series of closely-spaced hatchings all slanting the same way which, taken together, formed the beginning of a broad band across his eyes that was meant to make them stand out."


DEPENDING ON THE THICKNESS OF THE LINE AND HOW MUCH AREA HE HAD TO COVER, THE TATTOO MASTER PICKED FROM AMONG TEN COMBS MADE FROM BONE, TORTOISESHELL, OR TEETH. HE KEPT THEM IN A BAMBOO CASE.
THE INK WAS A MIXTURE OF SOOT, LAMPBLACK, AND ANIMAL FAT. THE MOTIFS WERE PRESENTED TO THE TATTOO-BEARER, CARVED INTO BITS OF WOOD SHAPED LIKE ARMS OR LEGS.

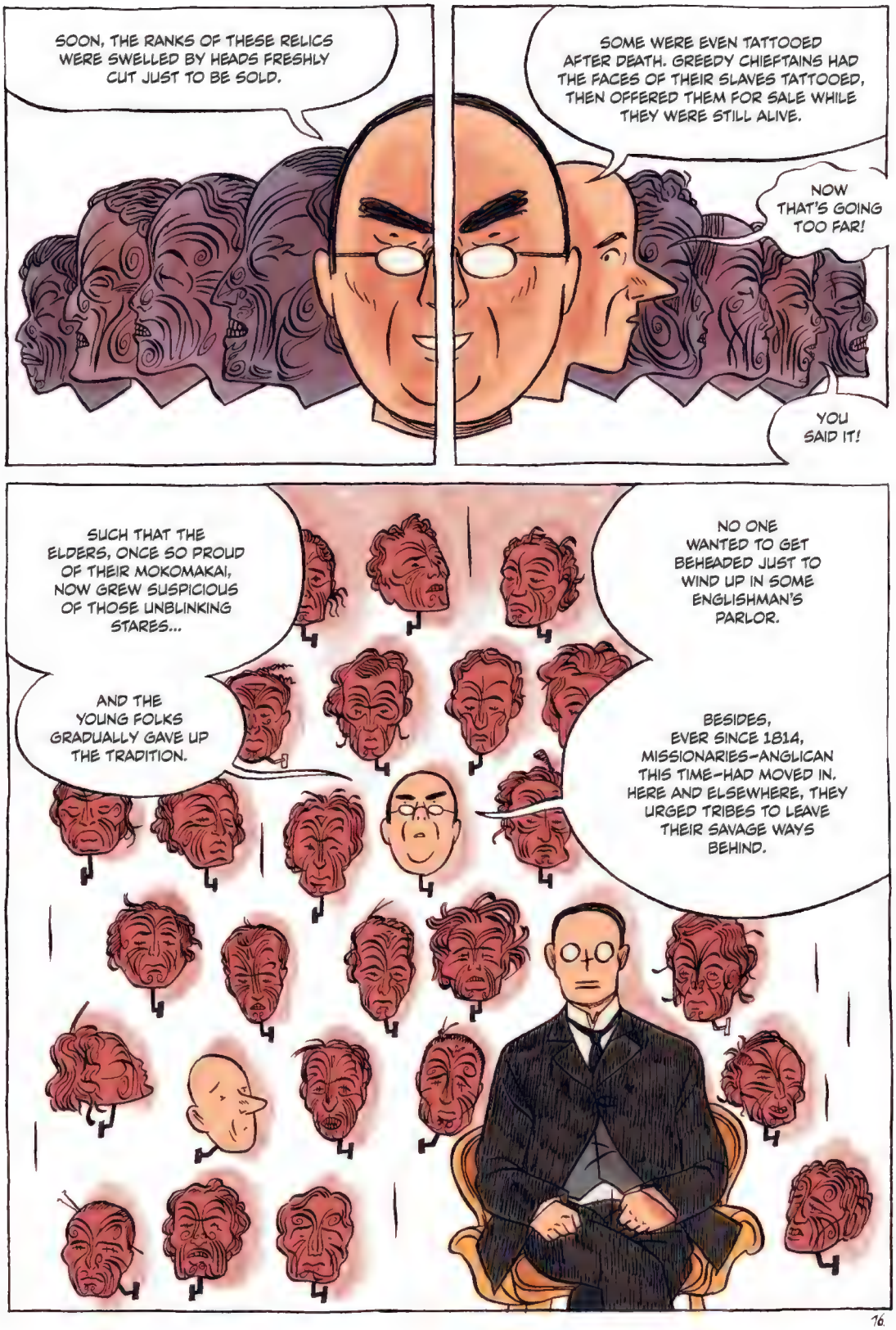
STARTING IN 1842, WHEN FRANCE CLAIMED THE MARQUESAS ISLANDS, THE PRACTICE OF TATTOOING WAS GRADUALLY ABANDONED. AT THE SAME TIME, TATTOOING FELL INTO DISGRACE ALMOST ALL OVER POLYNESIA. IT WAS A TARGET FOR MISSIONARIES, WHO SAW IT AS A HOLDOVER FROM PAGANISM.
UNDER PRESSURE FROM MISSIONARIES, CHIEFTAINS FORBADE TATTOOING AMONG THEIR SUBJECTS.
TAKE THE POMARE CODE IN TAHITI, FOR EXAMPLE.

SIGNED IN 1819 BY PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES AND KING POMARE II, THE CODE BANNED TATTOOING, JUST LIKE THE LAWS OF THE ISLAND OF HUAHINE DID IN 1822.
THIS PRACTICE IS A BAD HABIT CARRIED OVER FROM ANCIENT TIMES. MEN OR WOMEN WHO HAVE THEMSELVES TATTOOED WILL, IF CAUGHT, BE JUDGED AND PUNISHED!
ANOTHER WAY THE WESTERN PRIESTS KILLED TATTOOING WAS BY BANNING NUDITY. THE BODY, NOW DRESSED IN CLOTHES, NO LONGER PLAYED THE SAME SOCIAL OR IDENTIFYING ROLE.

AMONG THE MAORIS OF NEW ZEALAND, IT WAS THE HEADHUNTING THAT DID AWAY WITH TATTOOS. THE MAIN MOTIF WAS A FACIAL TATTOO FOR MEN NAMED MOKO. IT WAS APPLIED WITH A CHISEL MADE FROM BONE, SHELL, OR SHARK TOOTH.

A WARRIOR PEOPLE, THE MAORI CELEBRATED THEIR VICTORIES OVER ENEMY TRIBES BY CUTTING OFF THEIR HEADS AND PUTTING THEM ON STAKES LINED UP NEAR THE VILLAGE, WHERE EVERYONE COULD INSULT THEM AND SPIT ON THEM. THEN THEY WERE TOSSED TO THE DOGS.

FAMILIES ALSO KEPT THE HEADS OF THE DEAD. JUST AS ELSEWHERE IN POLYNESIA, THE HEAD WAS THE MOST SACRED PART OF THE BODY.
ONCE MUMMIFIED, THE RELIC, KNOWN AS PAKI PAKI, WAS GIVEN TO RELATIVES.
JOSEPH BANKS, A YOUNG AND BRILLIANT SCIENTIST ON THE COOK EXPEDITION, ACQUIRED ONE IN JUNE 1770.
EVERY EXPEDITION AFTER THAT TRIED TO NEGOTIATE FOR PAKI PAKI. SOON THERE WAS A LIVELY TRADE IN THESE RELICS.
SMUGGLERS EXPLOITED THIS RACY AND MACABRE MARKET.
YOUR ANCESTORS WEREN'T DRUG RUNNERS, BUT THIS WASN'T MUCH BETTER.
HEY, WAIT A SEC! I'VE GOT SCRUPLES!
ANYWAY, I'M IN HERE FOR ROBBERY!


SOON, THE RANKS OF THESE RELICS WERE SWELLED BY HEADS FRESHLY CUT JUST TO BE SOLD.
SOME WERE EVEN TATTOOED AFTER DEATH. GREEDY CHIEFTAINS HAD THE FACES OF THEIR SLAVES TATTOOED, THEN OFFERED THEM FOR SALE WHILE THEY WERE STILL ALIVE.
NOW THAT'S GOING TOO FAR!
YOU SAID IT!
SUCH THAT THE ELDERS, ONCE SO PROUD OF THEIR MOKOMAKAI, NOW GREW SUSPICIOUS OF THOSE UNBLINKING STARES...
AND THE YOUNG FOLKS GRADUALLY GAVE UP THE TRADITION.
NO ONE WANTED TO GET BEHEADED JUST TO WIND UP IN SOME ENGLISHMAN'S PARLOR.
BESIDES, EVER SINCE 1814, MISSIONARIES—ANGLICAN THIS TIME—HAD MOVED IN. HERE AND ELSEWHERE, THEY URGED TRIBES TO LEAVE THEIR SAVAGE WAYS BEHIND.

ONLY IN THE SAMOAN ARCHIPELAGO DID THE TATTOOING TRADITION REMAIN INTACT: THE PE'A, WHICH LOOKED LIKE SHORTS THAT WENT FROM WAIST TO KNEES. THEY'VE KEPT IT UP TILL THIS DAY.
IN 1899, THE ISLANDS, THEN A GERMAN PROTECTORATE, WERE SPLIT IN TWO: THE WESTERN ISLES REMAINED UNDER GERMAN CONTROL, WHILE THE EASTERN WENT TO THE AMERICANS.
POLITICAL PRISONERS, POPULATIONS THAT REJECTED FOREIGN INFLUENCE, AND OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME TOOK REFUGE IN THE EASTERN ISLANDS. SINCE COLONISTS AND MISSIONARIES HAD ABANDONED IT, IT WAS FORGOTTEN...

IT WAS IN THE AGE OF DISCOVERY THAT WESTERNERS REDISCOVERED TATTOOING. NATIVES' PAINTING AND TATTOOS–ALTERNATELY DUBBED "POURPOINTS," "STIGMATA," "MARKINGS," OR "STAINING"–WERE DESCRIBED IN A NUMBER OF ACCOUNTS.

IN THE 13TH CENTURY, VENETIAN MARCO POLO, BACK FROM CHINA, TOLD OF THE TATTOOED INHABITANTS OF YUNNAN AND THE KINGDOM OF BURMA (MYANMAR).

THREE CENTURIES LATER, FRENCHMAN JACQUES CARTIER AND ENGLISHMAN JOHN WHITE, WHO LED AN EXPEDITION TO VIRGINIA IN 1585, MET THE TATTOOED MEN OF THE NEW WORLD.

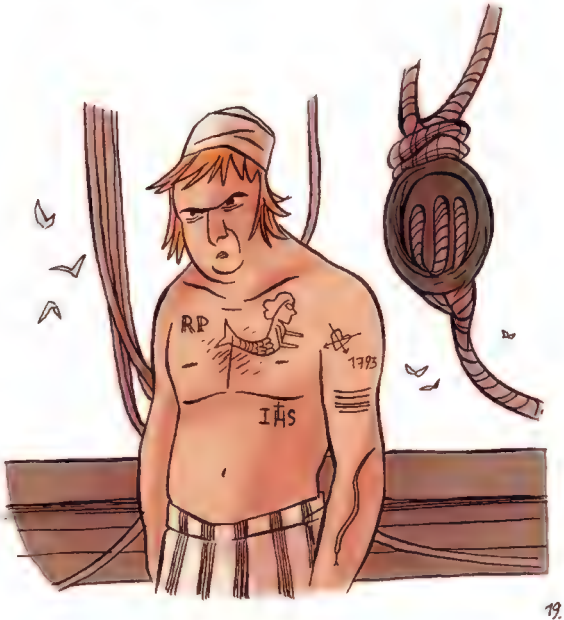
BUT THE SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITIONS THAT CRISSCROSSED THE PACIFIC IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 18TH CENTURY WOULD REINTRODUCE TATTOOING ONCE AND FOR ALL.

DURING THE ENLIGHTENMENT, FRENCH AND ENGLISH NAVIGATORS SURROUNDED THEMSELVES WITH SCHOLARS WHO STUDIED THIS EXOTIC CUSTOM AND IMMORTALIZED IT ON PAPER WITH MORE OR LESS FAITHFUL REPRODUCTIONS OF MOTIFS THEY'D SEEN.

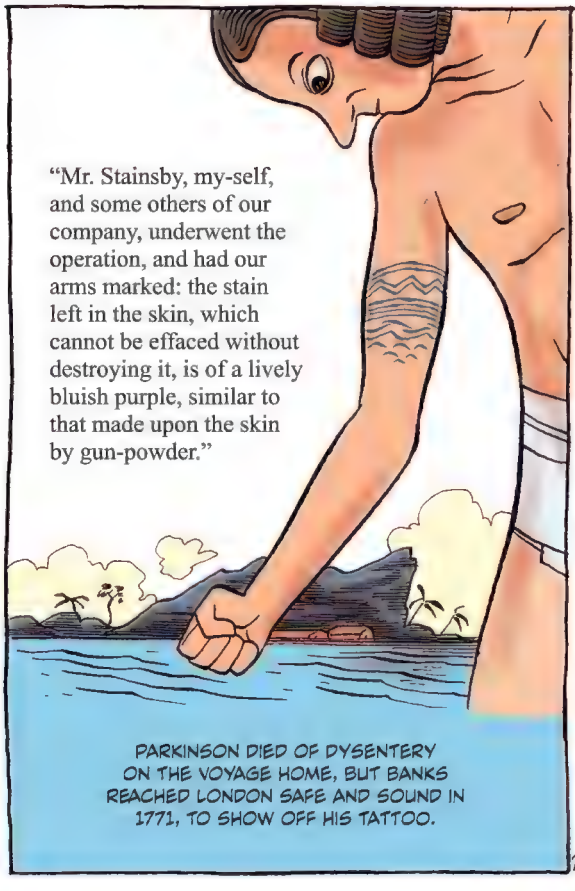
CAPTAIN JAMES COOK (1728-1779), WHO MADE THREE TRIPS TO THE PACIFIC, INTRODUCED AN EARLY FORM OF THE WORD "TATTOO."

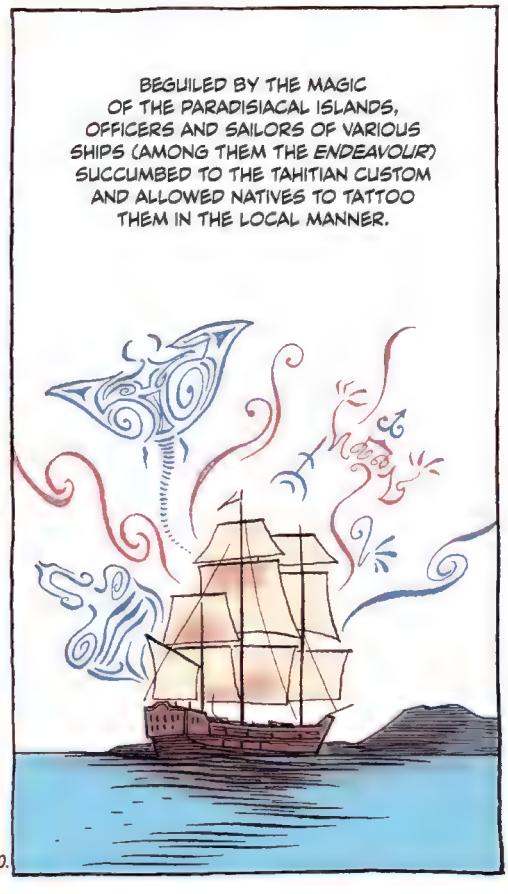
HIS SAILORS CALLED INK UNDER THE SKIN "TATTAW," FROM THE POLYNESIAN "TATAU," WHICH MEANS "TO STRIKE."

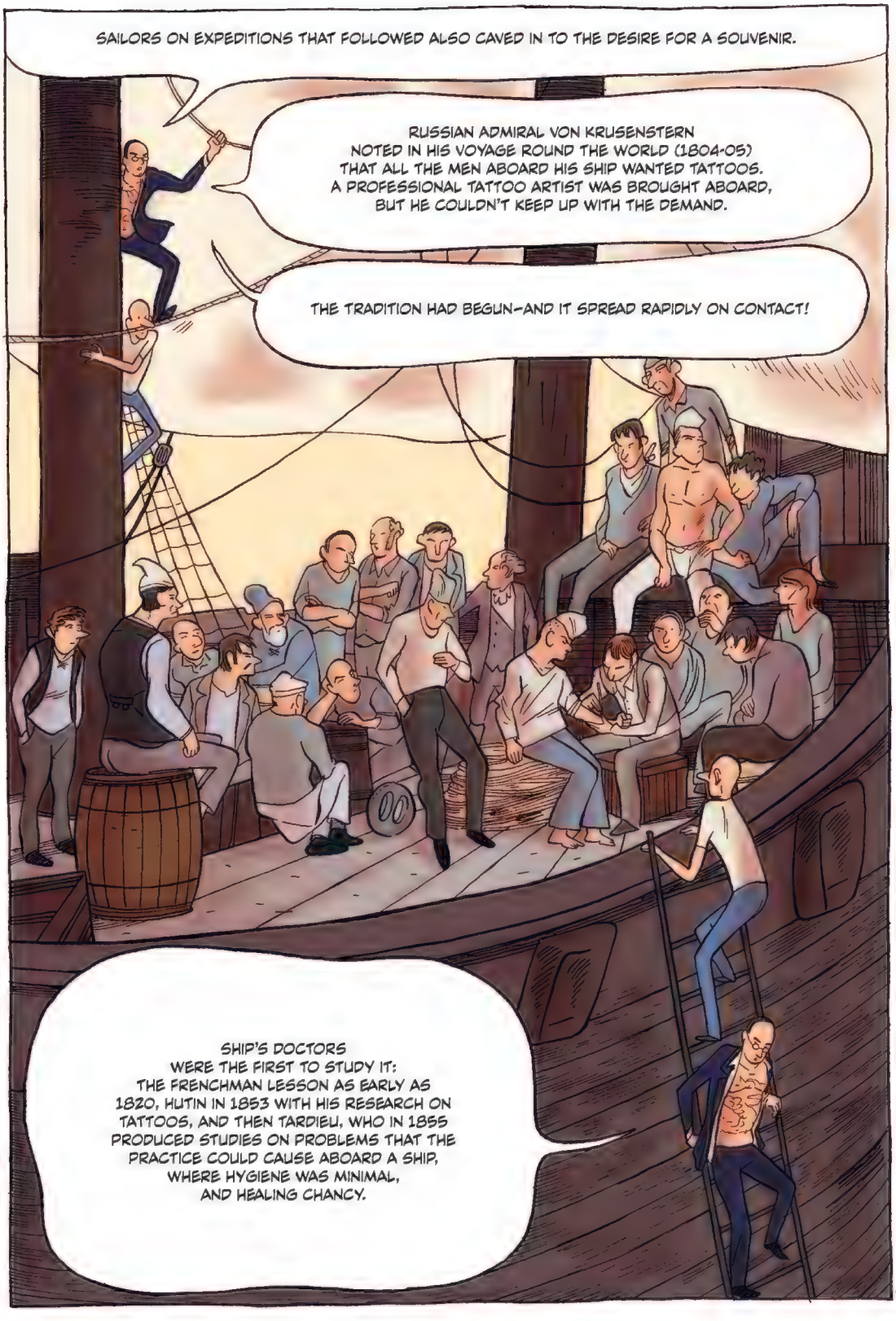
SOME MEMBERS OF HIS CREW RETURNED FROM THE SOUTH SEAS WITH INKED SOUVENIRS.

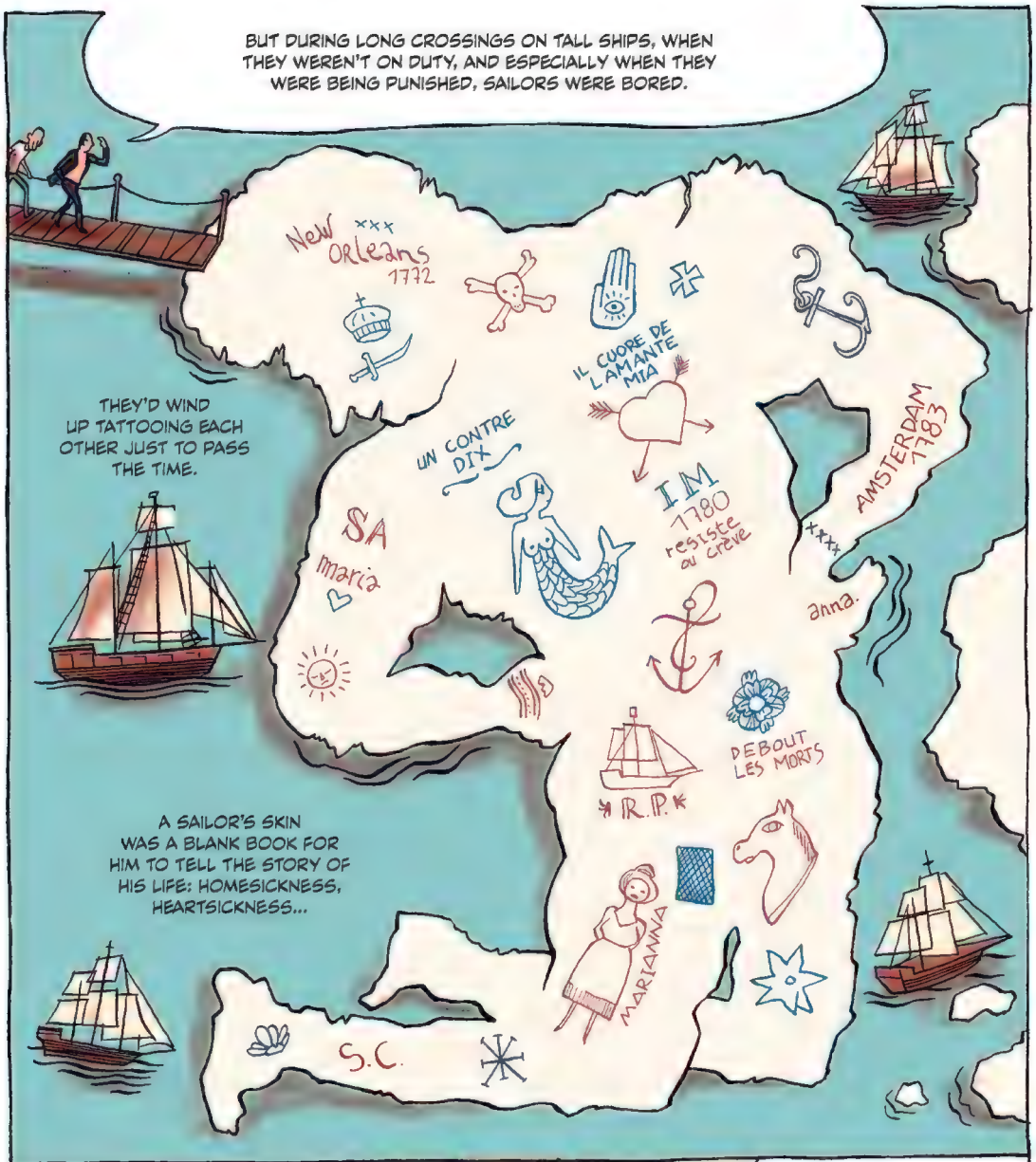


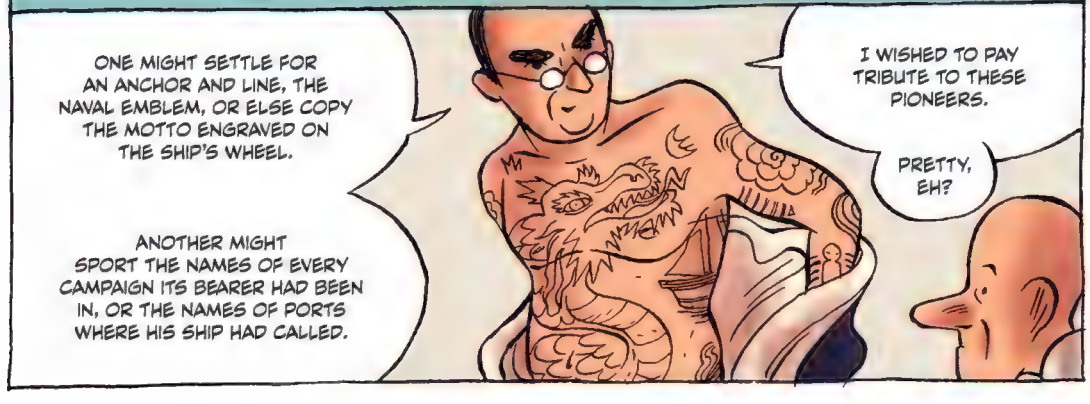
JOSEPH BANKS, ONE OF THE FIRST MEN TO BRING BACK A PAKI PAKI, WAS ALSO ONE OF THE FIRST TO SUCCUMB TO THE TATTOO TEMPTATION. IN AUGUST 1768, BANKS SET SAIL ABOARD COOK'S VESSEL, THE *ENDEAVOUR*, BOUND FOR TAHITI, WHICH HE REACHED EIGHT MONTHS LATER. HE WAS NOT ALONE. HIS FRIEND SYDNEY PARKINSON, SHIP'S DOCTOR, TELLS THE STORY IN HIS JOURNAL.
ALLOW ME TO READ...

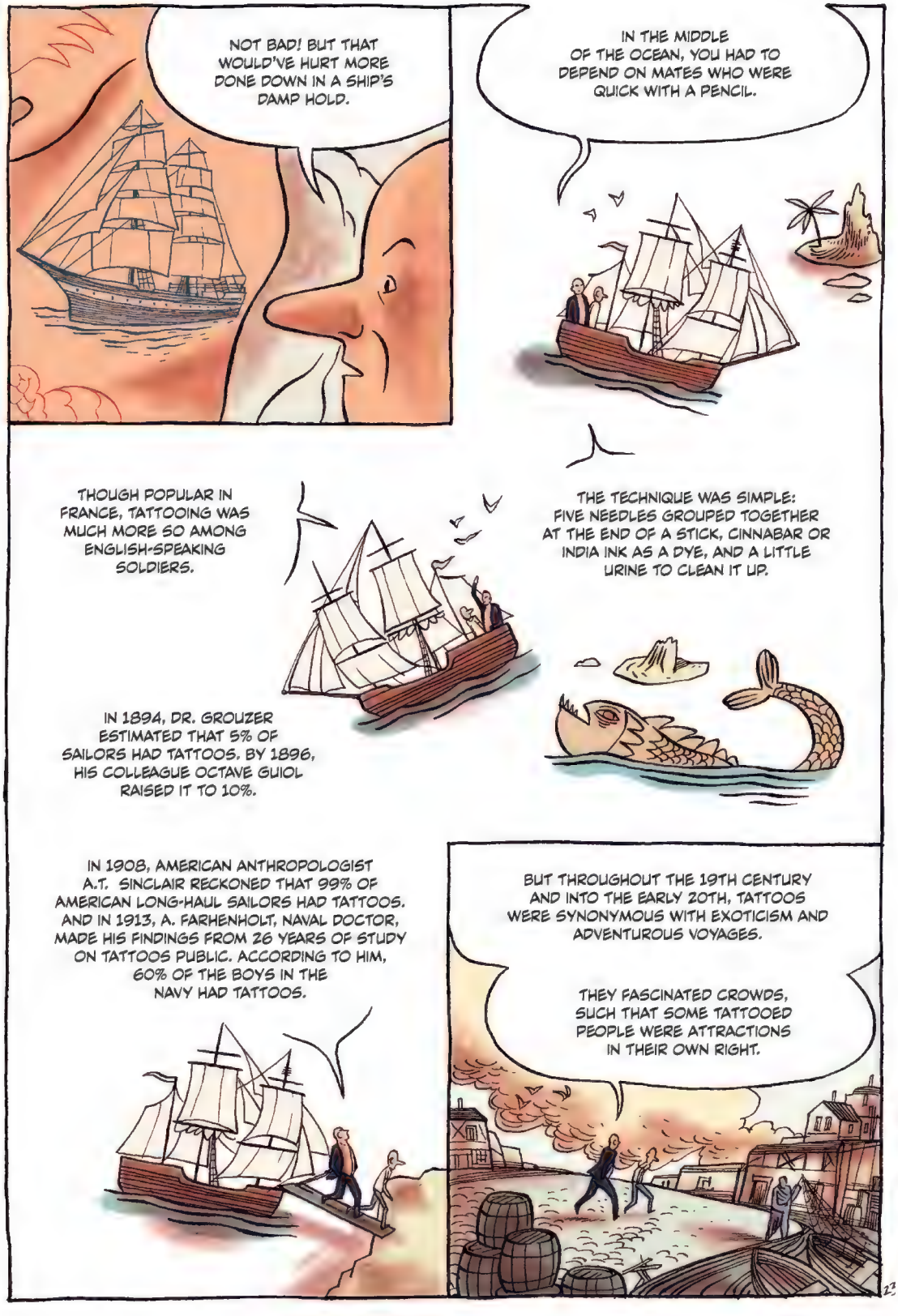

"Mr. Stainsby, my-self, and some others of our company, underwent the operation, and had our arms marked: the stain left in the skin, which cannot be effaced without destroying it, is of a lively bluish purple, similar to that made upon the skin by gun-powder."
PARKINSON DIED OF DYSENTERY ON THE VOYAGE HOME, BUT BANKS REACHED LONDON SAFE AND SOUND IN 1771, TO SHOW OFF HIS TATTOO.


BEGUILED BY THE MAGIC OF THE PARADISIACAL ISLANDS, OFFICERS AND SAILORS OF VARIOUS SHIPS (AMONG THEM THE *ENDEAVOUR*) SUCCUMBED TO THE TAHITIAN CUSTOM AND ALLOWED NATIVES TO TATTOO THEM IN THE LOCAL MANNER.


SAILORS ON EXPEDITIONS THAT FOLLOWED ALSO CAVED IN TO THE DESIRE FOR A SOUVENIR.
RUSSIAN ADMIRAL VON KRUSENSTERN NOTED IN HIS VOYAGE ROUND THE WORLD (1804-05) THAT ALL THE MEN ABOARD HIS SHIP WANTED TATTOOS. A PROFESSIONAL TATTOO ARTIST WAS BROUGHT ABOARD, BUT HE COULDN'T KEEP UP WITH THE DEMAND.
THE TRADITION HAD BEGUN—AND IT SPREAD RAPIDLY ON CONTACT!
SHIP'S DOCTORS WERE THE FIRST TO STUDY IT: THE FRENCHMAN LESSON AS EARLY AS 1820, HUTIN IN 1853 WITH HIS RESEARCH ON TATTOOS, AND THEN TARDIEU, WHO IN 1855 PRODUCED STUDIES ON PROBLEMS THAT THE PRACTICE COULD CAUSE ABOARD A SHIP, WHERE HYGIENE WAS MINIMAL, AND HEALING CHANCY.


BUT DURING LONG CROSSINGS ON TALL SHIPS, WHEN THEY WEREN'T ON DUTY, AND ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY WERE BEING PUNISHED, SAILORS WERE BORED.
New Orleans 1772
IL CUORE DE L'AMANTE MIA
UN CONTRE DIX
IM 1780 resiste au crève
AMSTERDAM 1783
SA maria
anna.
DEBOUT LES MORTS
R.I.P.
MARIANNA
S.C.
THEY'D WIND UP TATTOOING EACH OTHER JUST TO PASS THE TIME.
A SAILOR'S SKIN WAS A BLANK BOOK FOR HIM TO TELL THE STORY OF HIS LIFE: HOMESICKNESS, HEARTSICKNESS...


ONE MIGHT SETTLE FOR AN ANCHOR AND LINE, THE NAVAL EMBLEM, OR ELSE COPY THE MOTTO ENGRAVED ON THE SHIP'S WHEEL.
ANOTHER MIGHT SPORT THE NAMES OF EVERY CAMPAIGN ITS BEARER HAD BEEN IN, OR THE NAMES OF PORTS WHERE HIS SHIP HAD CALLED.
I WISHED TO PAY TRIBUTE TO THESE PIONEERS.
PRETTY, EH?


NOT BAD! BUT THAT WOULD'VE HURT MORE DONE DOWN IN A SHIP'S DAMP HOLD.
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN, YOU HAD TO DEPEND ON MATES WHO WERE QUICK WITH A PENCIL.
THOUGH POPULAR IN FRANCE, TATTOOING WAS MUCH MORE SO AMONG ENGLISH-SPEAKING SOLDIERS.
THE TECHNIQUE WAS SIMPLE: FIVE NEEDLES GROUPED TOGETHER AT THE END OF A STICK, CINNABAR OR INDIA INK AS A DYE, AND A LITTLE URINE TO CLEAN IT UP.
IN 1894, DR. GROUZER ESTIMATED THAT 5% OF SAILORS HAD TATTOOS. BY 1896, HIS COLLEAGUE OCTAVE GUIOL RAISED IT TO 10%.
IN 1908, AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST A.T. SINCLAIR RECKONED THAT 99% OF AMERICAN LONG-HAUL SAILORS HAD TATTOOS. AND IN 1913, A. FARHENHOLT, NAVAL DOCTOR, MADE HIS FINDINGS FROM 26 YEARS OF STUDY ON TATTOOS PUBLIC. ACCORDING TO HIM, 60% OF THE BOYS IN THE NAVY HAD TATTOOS.
BUT THROUGHOUT THE 19TH CENTURY AND INTO THE EARLY 20TH, TATTOOS WERE SYNONYMOUS WITH EXOTICISM AND ADVENTUROUS VOYAGES.
THEY FASCINATED CROWDS, SUCH THAT SOME TATTOOED PEOPLE WERE ATTRACTIONS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT.

THE EARLIEST EXPLORERS HAD BEGUN THE PRACTICE OF BRINGING BACK SPECIMENS FROM THEIR FAR-FLUNG TRAVELS TO EXHIBIT IN EUROPE.

IN 1576, SR. MARTIN FROBISHER BROUGHT BACK TO ENGLAND AN INUIT WOMAN WITH TATTOOS ON HER CHIN AND FOREHEAD.

ALMOST A CENTURY LATER, IN 1691, ENGLISH SLAVER AND FREEBOOTER WILLIAM DAMPIER BROUGHT BACK AND EXHIBITED PRINCE GIOLO, ORIGINALLY FROM MIANGAS, AN ISLAND SOUTH OF MINDANAO IN THE PHILIPPINES.

HE WAS TATTOOED FROM HEAD TO FOOT. DAMPIER PRESENTED HIM TO THE KING AND QUEEN, WHICH ENSURED THE PUBLICITY OF HIS SPECTACLE.

AND HE LAID IT ON THICK, TO SPICE UP HIS STORY.

NO LESS THAN THE KING OF MINDANAO WAS SAID TO HAVE CAPTURED GIOLO, BLAH BLAH BLAH...

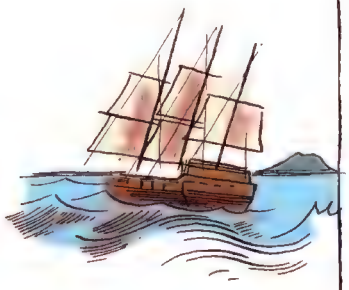
HAH!

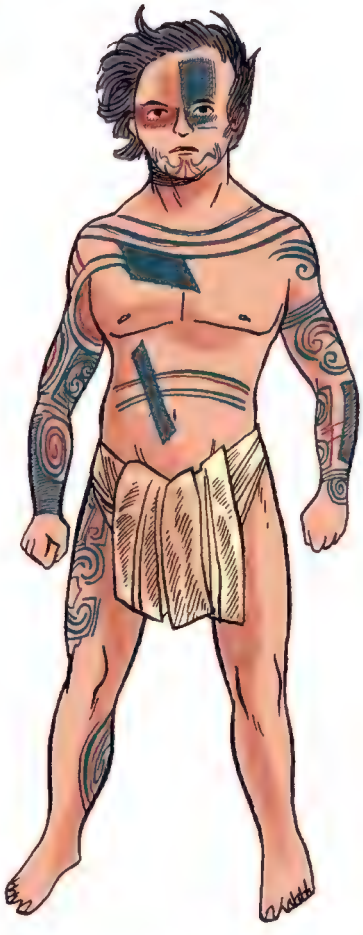
IN REALITY, LIKE ANY MAN OF HIS TRIBE, HE'D SIMPLY GOTTEN TATTOOED BY ONE OF HIS FIVE WIVES.

SHORT OF MONEY, DAMPIER SOLD OFF GIOLO, WHO DIED SHORTLY AFTERWARDS OF SMALLPOX IN OXFORD.

IN THE EARLY 18TH CENTURY, IT WAS THE NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS' TURN TO BE PRESENTED TO HEADS OF STATE. IN 1723, CHRONICLES MENTION THE EXISTENCE OF TWO TATTOOED MEN FAMOUS THROUGHOUT EUROPE.
THEN THE FRENCHMAN BOUGAINVILLE CAME BACK FROM TAHITI IN 1769 WITH CHIEF AOTOUROU.
THE YOUNG CHIEF HAD VOLUNTEERED FOR AN ELEVEN-MONTH TOUR THAT PROVED A TRIUMPH.
FIVE YEARS LATER, OMAI, PRINCE OF RA'IATEA (ALSO IN POLYNESIA), LANDED IN LONDON.
HIRED ON AS AN INTERPRETER DURING COOK'S SECOND VOYAGE, HE MADE LANDFALL IN ENGLAND RIGHT AFTER A VIOLENT STORM.
HE BECAME AN IDOL TO THE GENTRY, AND AFTER TWO YEARS OF BALLS AND HUNTING PARTIES, HE RETURNED TO HIS NATIVE ISLAND ON COOK'S THIRD VOYAGE.
COMING?

AFTER THE WAVE OF "SAVAGES" PARADED BEFORE THE COURTS OF EUROPE, A FEW SAILORS THEMSELVES, WHO HAD BROUGHT BACK INKY SOUVENIRS OF THEIR TIME IN THE ISLES, BECAME OBJECTS OF CURIOSITY.



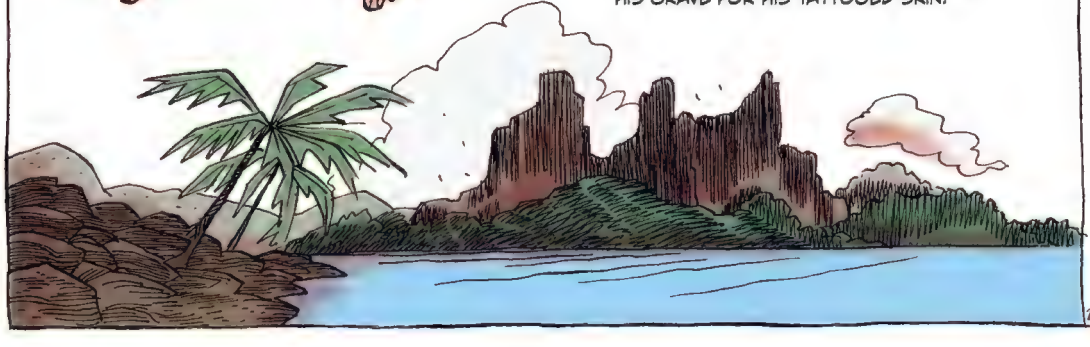


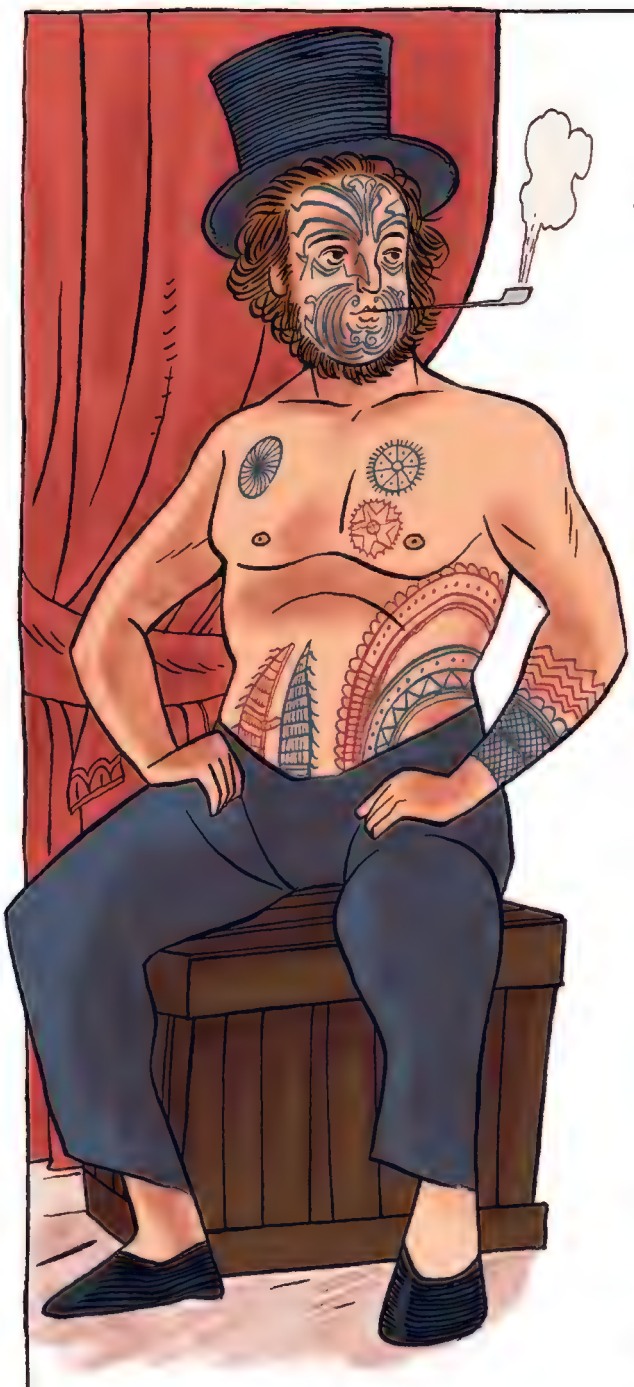
AMONG THEM, FRENCHMAN JEAN-BAPTISTE CABRI, WHO IN 1817 SHOWED UP IN RUSSIA AT THE TSAR'S COURT, BEFORE A TOUR OF THE FAIRS OF EUROPE.

ORIGINALLY FROM BORDEAUX, HE SET SAIL IN 1794 AT THE AGE OF 14, ABOARD A CORSAIR. CAPTURED BY THE ENGLISH, HE WOUND UP ON A WHALING SHIP HE THEN DESERTED IN 1795, DURING A STOPOVER IN THE MARQUESAS.

HE JOINED A TRIBE ON THE ISLAND OF TAHUATA, MARRIED THE CHIEFTAIN'S DAUGHTER, AND HAD HIS FACE AND BODY TATTOOED IN THE LOCAL FASHION. FOUR YEARS LATER, INTER-TRIBAL WARFARE FORCED HIM TO THE NEIGHBORING ISLAND OF NUKU HIVA. THERE, HE WAS A BEACHCOMBER AND WRECK LOOTER, AND WORKED AS AN INTERPRETER FOR THE NAVIGATOR VON LANGSDORFF IN 1804. FINALLY HE LEFT THE ARCHIPELAGO AGAINST HIS WILL WITH VON KRUSENSTERN'S RUSSIAN EXPEDITION. CABRI WAS SLEEPING OFF A DRUNK ON ONE OF THE SHIPS WHEN IT LEFT.

AFTER EARNING A LIVING IN A SIDESHOW, HE DIED IN 1822 AND ENDED UP IN A COMMUNAL GRAVE IN VALENCIENNES, TO KEEP THE CURIOUS FROM DESECRATING HIS GRAVE FOR HIS TATTOOED SKIN.





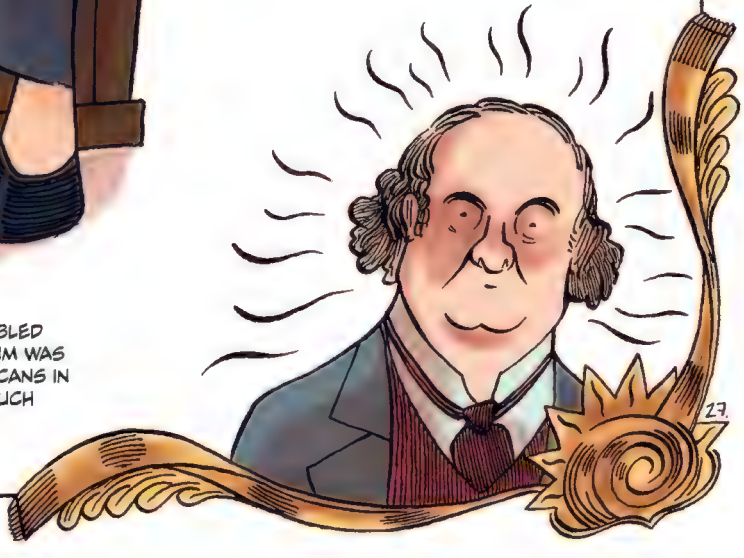
IN 1828, BRISTOL SAW THE RISE OF JOHN RUTHERFORD, NICKNAMED THE "WHITE CHIEF." IT WAS HIS TURN TO SHED HIS CLOTHES AND SHOW OFF HIS COLORFUL ANATOMY.

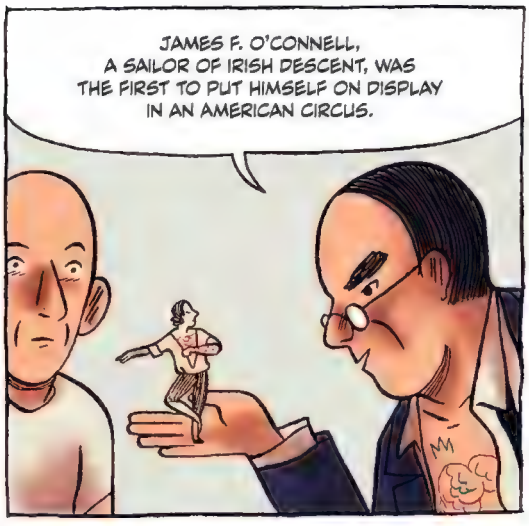
THE BRITISH SAILOR CLAIMED THAT AFTER HIS CAPTURE, THE TRIBE FORCED TATTOOS UPON HIM, INCLUDING THE MOKO THAT ADORNED HIS FACE AND TOOK FOUR HOURS TO COMPLETE, FOLLOWED BY SIX WEEKS OF HEALING.

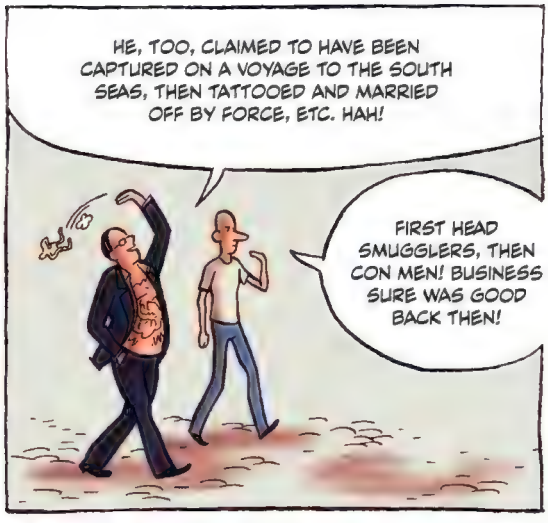
HE WAS PICKED UP BY AN AMERICAN VESSEL THAT DROPPED HIM OFF IN HAWAII. FROM THERE, HE MADE HIS WAY TO ENGLAND.

HE, TOO, WOULD MAKE THE ROUNDS OF WORLDLY SALONS BEFORE THE TRUTH BROKE OUT: HE WAS LAWFULLY MARRIED IN NEW ZEALAND, WHERE HE HAD CHILDREN.

IF THE EUROPEANS DABBLED AMATEURISHLY, P.T. BARNUM WAS SOON TO LEAD THE AMERICANS IN PROFESSIONALIZING SUCH ATTRACTIONS.

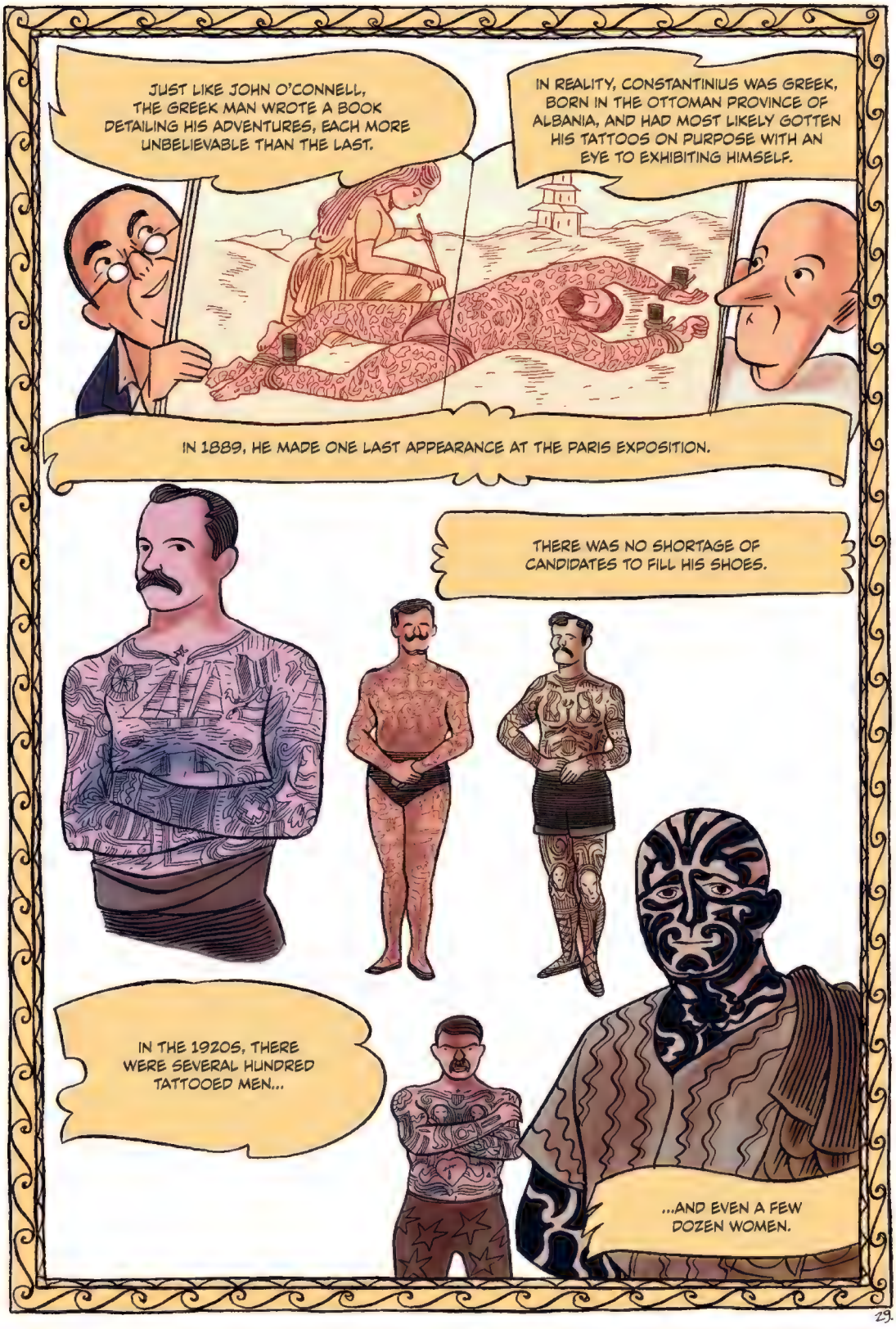





HE, TOO, CLAIMED TO HAVE BEEN CAPTURED ON A VOYAGE TO THE SOUTH SEAS, THEN TATTOOED AND MARRIED OFF BY FORCE, ETC. HAH!
FIRST HEAD SMUGGLERS, THEN CON MEN! BUSINESS SURE WAS GOOD BACK THEN!

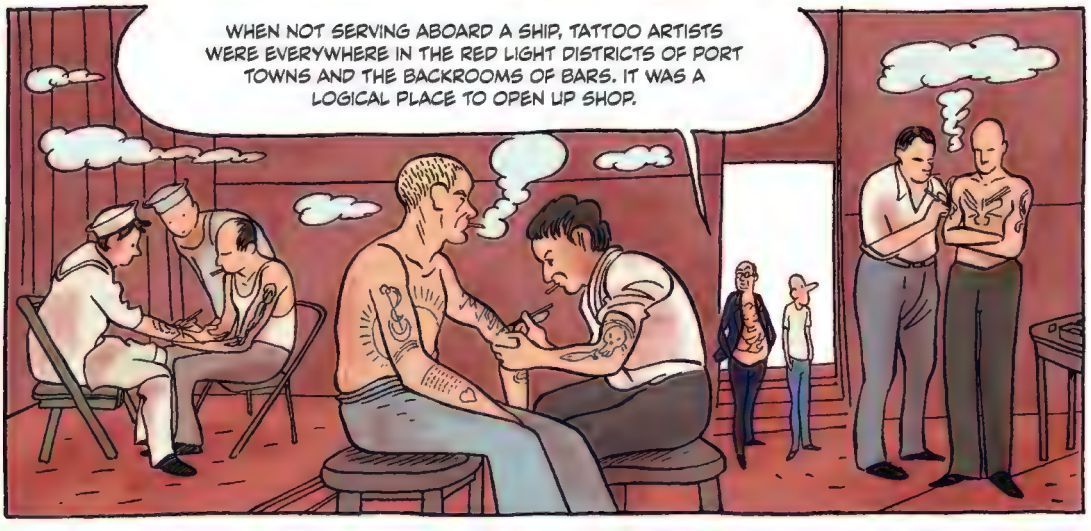
IN 1873, BARNUM, WHO CALLED HIS TRAVELING SHOW A "WORLD'S FAIR," BROUGHT BACK FROM THE CIRCUS IN VIENNA A CERTAIN GEORGE CONSTANTINIUS.

THE "MAN FROM BURMA," AS HE CALLED HIMSELF, HAD 388 FIGURES IN COLOR ON HIS BODY. BARNUM MADE HIM A PRINCE, THEN A CAPTAIN, BUT ESPECIALLY, THE MOST FAMOUS TATTOOED MAN OF THE 19TH CENTURY.

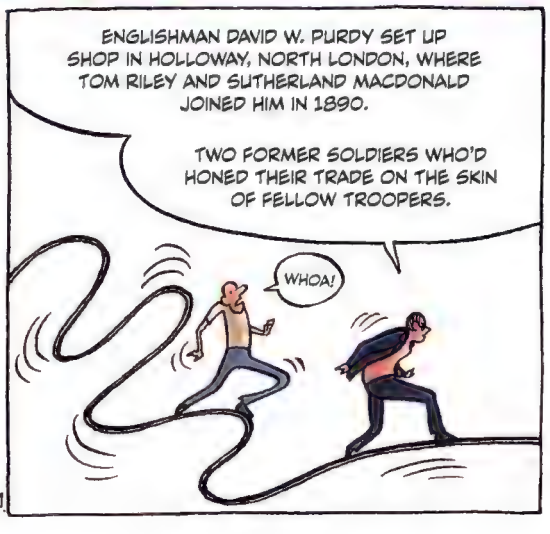

JUST LIKE JOHN O'CONNELL, THE GREEK MAN WROTE A BOOK DETAILING HIS ADVENTURES, EACH MORE UNBELIEVABLE THAN THE LAST.
IN REALITY, CONSTANTINIUS WAS GREEK, BORN IN THE OTTOMAN PROVINCE OF ALBANIA, AND HAD MOST LIKELY GOTTEN HIS TATTOOS ON PURPOSE WITH AN EYE TO EXHIBITING HIMSELF.
IN 1889, HE MADE ONE LAST APPEARANCE AT THE PARIS EXPOSITION.
THERE WAS NO SHORTAGE OF CANDIDATES TO FILL HIS SHOES.
IN THE 1920S, THERE WERE SEVERAL HUNDRED TATTOOED MEN...
...AND EVEN A FEW DOZEN WOMEN.

THEY FIRST APPEARED ONSTAGE IN LONDON, 1890. A NOTABLE EXAMPLE WAS IRENE WOODWARD, WHO "PERFORMED" TILL 1916.
THERE WAS ALSO A PAIR OF AMERICANS, FRANK AND EMMA DE BURGH.
THEN GERMANY, CRADLE OF THE CIRCUS, EMERGED WITH MARIE, "LA BELLE ANGORA," THE PEARL OF THE RHINE...
AND DJITA SALOMÉ, THE ORIENTAL BEAUTY, A.K.A. "THE BLUE LADY": TATTOOED WITH A HUNDRED MILLION DOTS BY DAKOTA INDIANS.

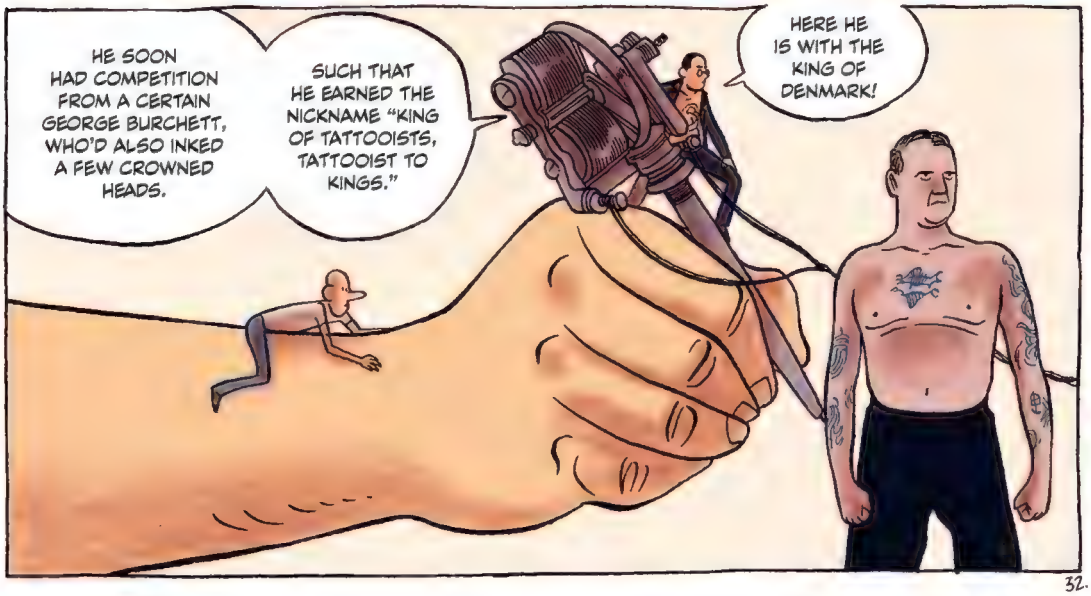
IF FAIRS HAD SO MANY TATTOOED ATTRACTIONS, THAT WAS BECAUSE PEOPLE COULD NOW GO GET OFFICIALLY TATTOOED WITHOUT SIGNING ON TO A SHIP'S CREW.

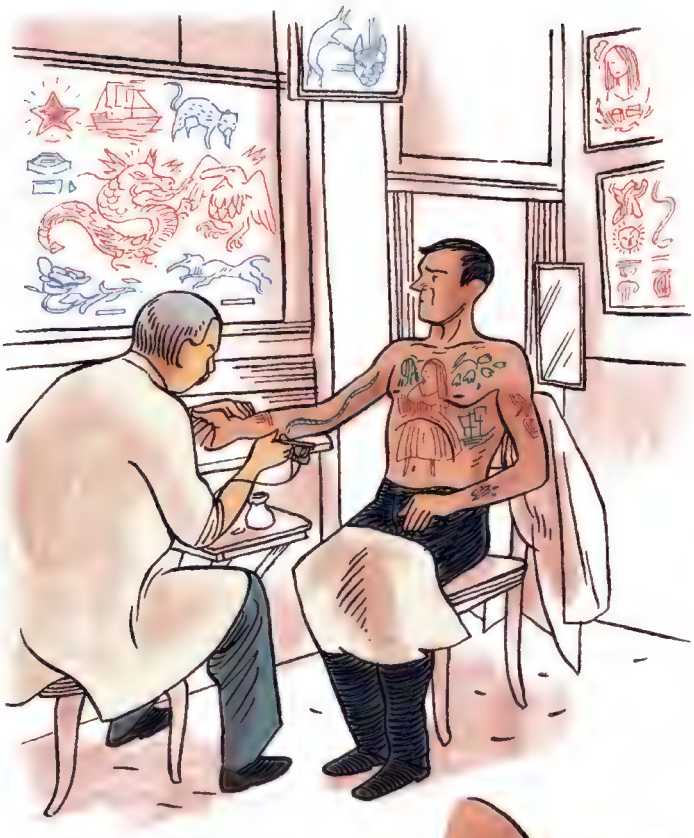

WHEN NOT SERVING ABOARD A SHIP, TATTOO ARTISTS WERE EVERYWHERE IN THE RED LIGHT DISTRICTS OF PORT TOWNS AND THE BACKROOMS OF BARS. IT WAS A LOGICAL PLACE TO OPEN UP SHOP.

IN 1846, TATTOO ARTIST MARTIN HILDEBRANDT OPENED THE FIRST TATTOO PARLOR IN THE WEST, IN NYC.
EUROPE HAD TO WAIT TILL 1879.


ENGLISHMAN DAVID W. PURDY SET UP SHOP IN HOLLOWAY, NORTH LONDON, WHERE TOM RILEY AND SUTHERLAND MACDONALD JOINED HIM IN 1890.
TWO FORMER SOLDIERS WHO'D HONED THEIR TRADE ON THE SKIN OF FELLOW TROOPERS.
WHOA!

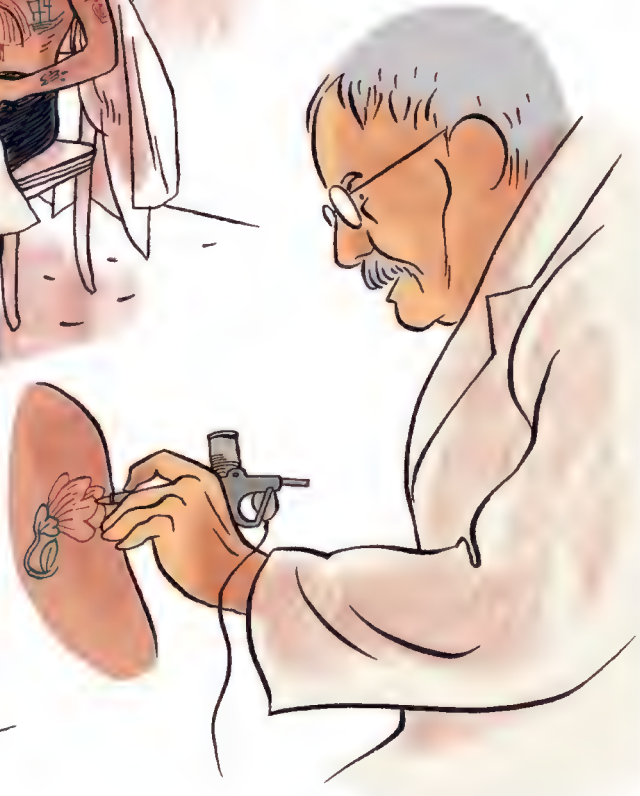
TOM RILEY WAS A PIONEER.
HE WAS THE FIRST EUROPEAN TATTOO ARTIST TO USE AN ELECTRIC MACHINE.
IT HAD BEEN PATENTED IN 1891 BY A CERTAIN SAMUEL O'REILLY OF NEW YORK.
APART FROM SAILORS, WHO MADE UP MOST OF HIS CLIENTELE, SUTHERLAND, NICKNAMED THE "MICHELANGELO" OF TATTOOING, ALSO TATTOOED BIGWIGS.
GRAND DUKES KONSTANTIN, NIKOLAI, AND ALEXANDER, PRINCE GEORGE OF GREECE, KING OSCAR OF SWEDEN, THE PRINCE OF WALES AND THE FUTURE KING OF ENGLAND...

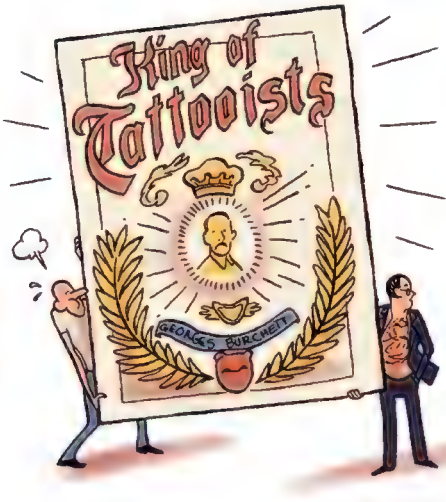

HE SOON HAD COMPETITION FROM A CERTAIN GEORGE BURCHETT, WHO'D ALSO INKED A FEW CROWNED HEADS.
SUCH THAT HE EARNED THE NICKNAME "KING OF TATTOOISTS, TATTOOIST TO KINGS."
HERE HE IS WITH THE KING OF DENMARK!



BURCHETT JOINED THE NAVY AND LEARNED TO TATTOO FROM THE TATTOOIST ON HIS SHIP BEFORE DESERTING IN 1887 IN JAFFA, PALESTINE.

HE MADE IT TO JERUSALEM AND SET UP SHOP AS A TATTOOIST FOR PILGRIMS, WORKING WITH GREEK, FRENCH, ITALIAN, SYRIAN, AND MARONITE COLLEAGUES.



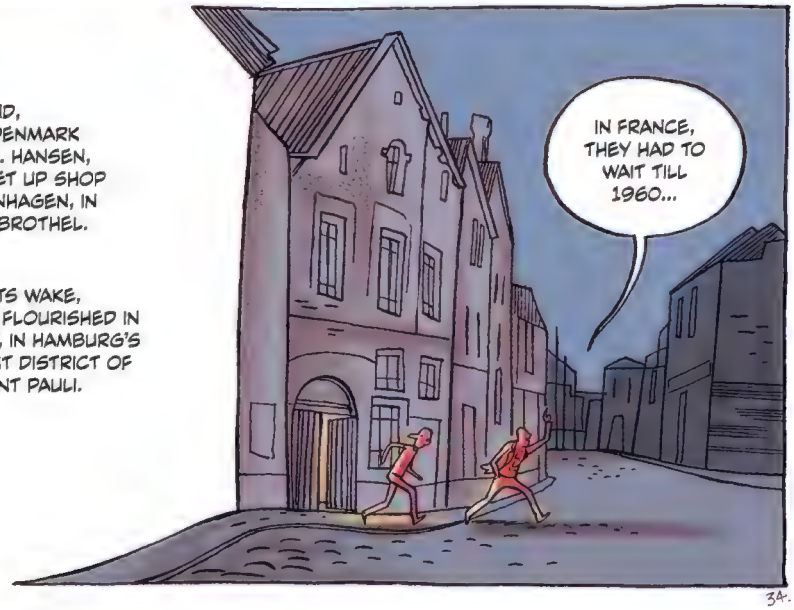


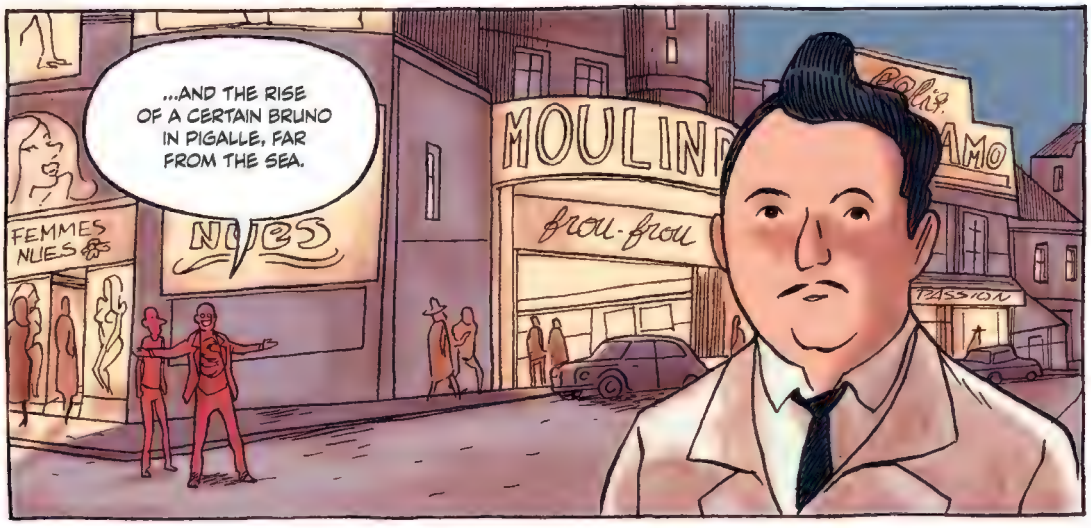
IN 1896, BURCHETT WENT HOME TO ENGLAND, AND OPENED HIS FIRST PARLOR NOT LONG AFTER, AT 438 MILE END ROAD, A HOPPING PART OF LONDON. THEN HE MOVED TO WATERLOO ROAD.

APART FROM THE OCCASIONAL ROYALTY, TATTOOING IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD WAS STILL MOSTLY THE PROVINCE OF SAILORS ON A SPREE IN THE SEEDY UNDERBELLY OF TOWN: BARS, BENDERS, BRAWLS, HOOKERS, AND INKED SOUVENIRS FROM LEAVE.
TOUT ME FAIT RIRE
ANNA
MARO

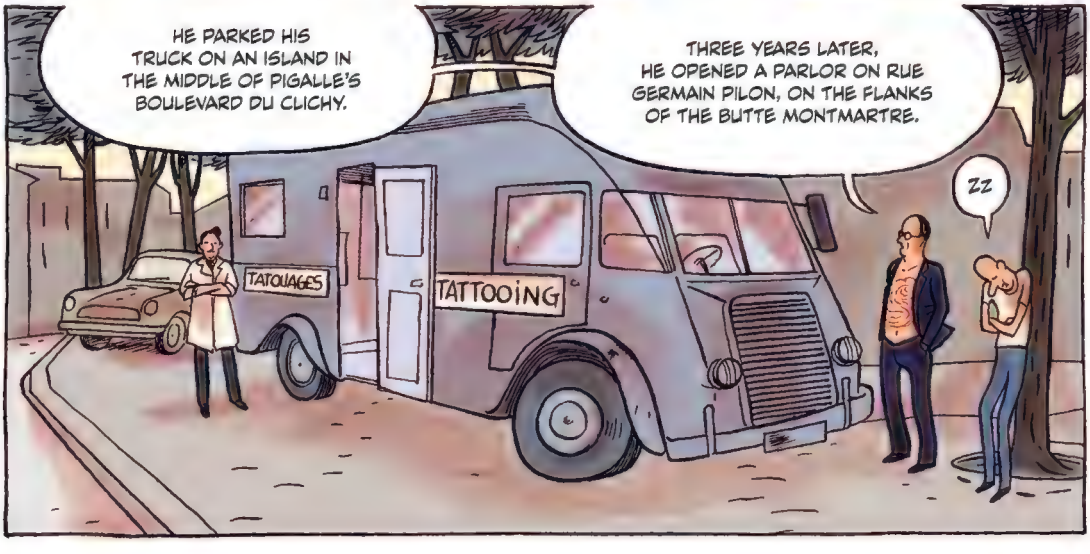
AFTER ENGLAND, PARLORS CAME TO DENMARK NEXT. IN 1901, HANS J. HANSEN, A.K.A. "TUSCH HANS" SET UP SHOP IN THE PORT OF COPENHAGEN, IN THE BASEMENT OF A BROTHEL.

IN ITS WAKE, PARLORS FLOURISHED IN GERMANY, IN HAMBURG'S RED LIGHT DISTRICT OF SAINT PAULI.



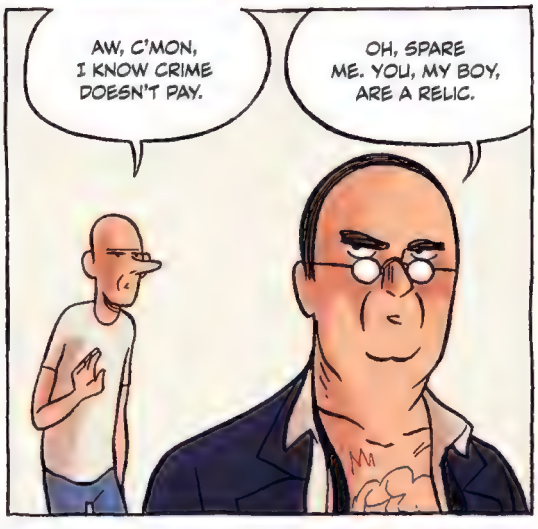


HE WAS A FRUIT-AND-VEGETABLE WHOLESALER AND BROTHER-IN-LAW OF THE TATTOOIST PETER AMSTERDAM, THE MOST FAMOUS DUTCH TATTOO ARTIST. PETER TATTOOED WHOLE CREWS OF TIPSY SAILORS, EARNING SUCH A GOOD LIVING THAT BRUNO FOLLOWED IN HIS FOOTSTEPS.

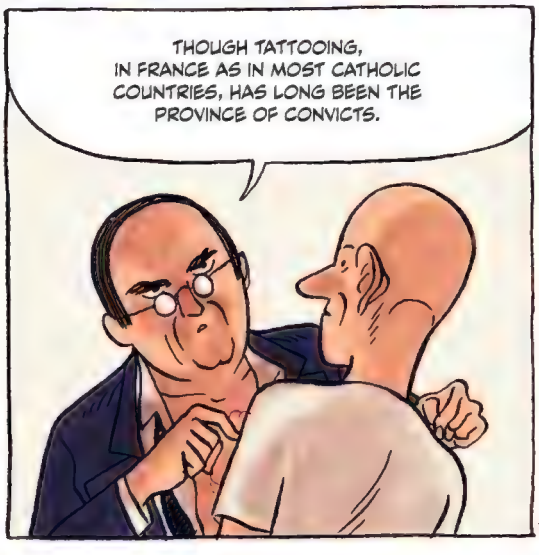

HE PARKED HIS TRUCK ON AN ISLAND IN THE MIDDLE OF PIGALLE'S BOULEVARD DU CLICHY.
THREE YEARS LATER, HE OPENED A PARLOR ON RUE GERMAIN PILON, ON THE FLANKS OF THE BUTTE MONTMARTRE.
TATOUAGES
TATTOOING
ZZ

WHAT ARE YOU, BORED? SPEAK UP!
WHA-? UH, N-NO SIR, WARDEN!

IT'S JUST, THE GAME WAS ON LAST NIGHT, EVERYONE WAS REALLY LOUD AND-
IT'S HIGH TIME WE TALKED ABOUT WHAT INTERESTS YOU MOST.
FELLOW INMATES.

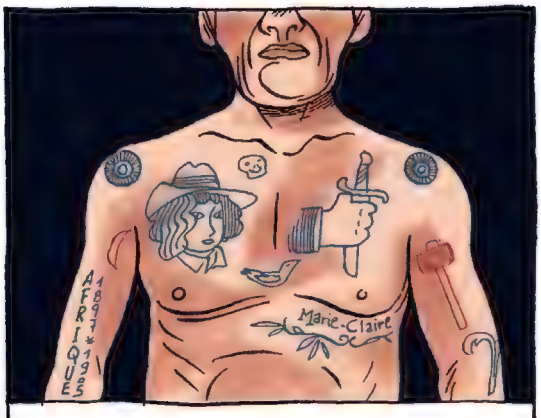

AW, C'MON, I KNOW CRIME DOESN'T PAY.
OH, SPARE ME. YOU, MY BOY, ARE A RELIC.

WHAT? SURE, I'VE DONE SEVEN YEARS, BUT I'M NOT THAT OLD! I'M 22!
NO, I MEANT YOUR HOMEMADE TATTOOS. FEWER AND FEWER PEOPLE GO FOR THEM.


THOUGH TATTOOING, IN FRANCE AS IN MOST CATHOLIC COUNTRIES, HAS LONG BEEN THE PROVINCE OF CONVICTS.

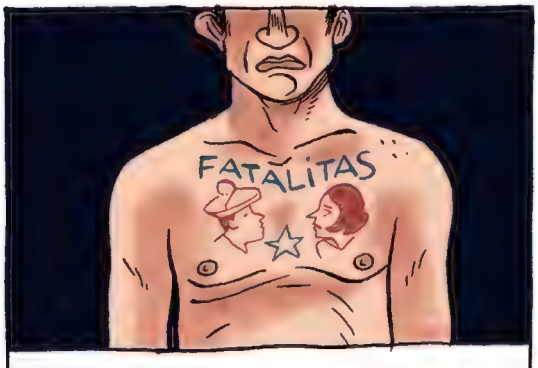
EVER SINCE IT WAS POPULARIZED AGAIN BY THE AGE OF DISCOVERY, AND THEN SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITIONS TO THE SOUTH SEAS, TATTOOING HAS BEEN SLIPPING FROM THE SKINS OF SAILORS...

...ONTO THAT
OF BAD BOYS.

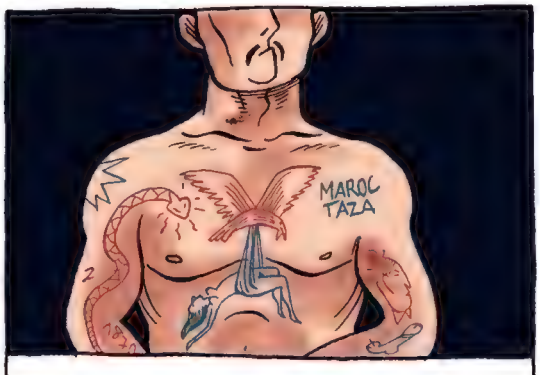


AS EARLY AS 1831, A PAMPHLET DEVOTED TO TATTOOS WAS SENT AROUND TO PRISON WARDENS.

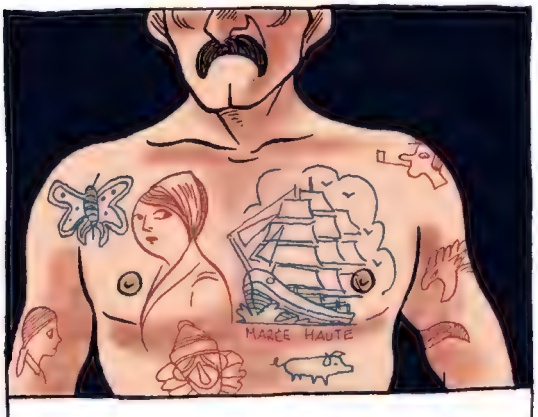
AND IN OCTOBER 1849, A MEMO FROM THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR NOTED THAT THEY COULD HELP IN IDENTIFYING CRIMINALS.



"IT IS ESPECIALLY USEFUL TO TAKE NOTE OF OBJECTS REPRESENTED IN TATTOOS, INDEPENDENTLY OF THE GENERAL DEMEANOR OF THE BEARER."

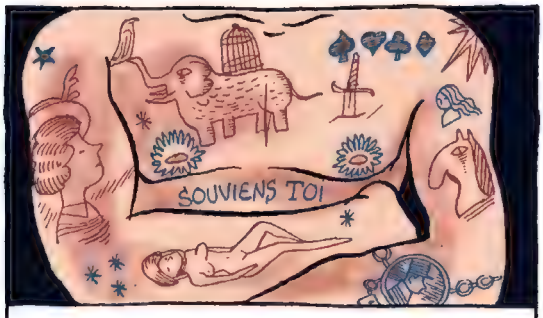


STARTING IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY, NAVAL DOCTORS MADE WAY FOR CRIMINOLOGISTS, THE MOST FAMOUS OF WHICH WAS ALEXANDRE LACASSAGNE OF LYON.

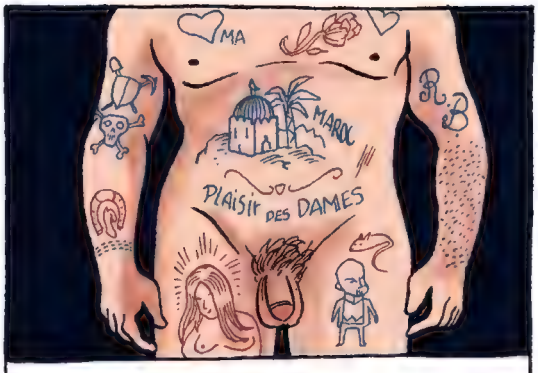


IN 1881, HE PUBLISHED THE DEFINITIVE WORK ON THE TOPIC—*TATTOOS: A MEDICAL, LEGAL, AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY.*

TO DO SO, HE AMASSED A COLLECTION OF 2,400 TATTOOS COPIED FROM THE SKINS OF MORE THAN 300 SUBJECTS.

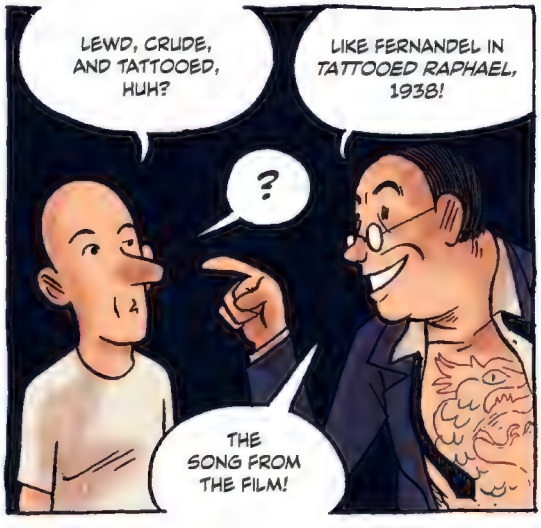


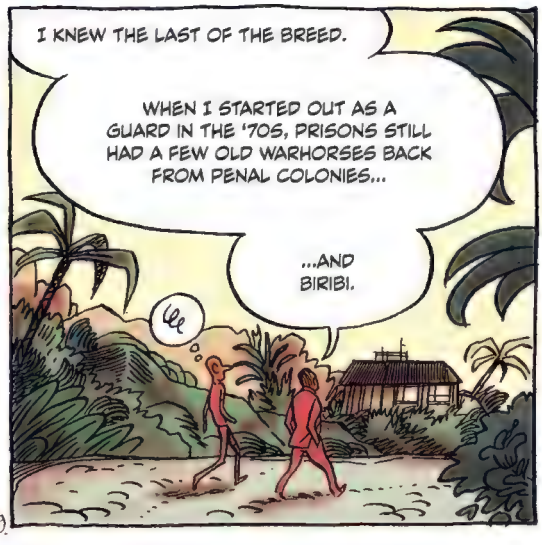
A FEW YEARS EARLIER IN 1876, ITALIAN CESARE LOMBROSO HAD PUBLISHED *THE CRIMINAL MAN*, IN WHICH HE PRESENTED HIS THEORY ON THE ATAVISTIC ORIGINS OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR, AND SINGLED OUT TATTOOS AS ONE OF THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF CRIMINALS.



AT THE DAWN OF THE 20TH CENTURY, TO BE A REAL TOUGH GUY, A FRENCH FELON HAD TO BE "SCREWED UP AND SCREWED OVER": A.K.A. SYPHILITIC AND TATTOOED.

THE DISEASE TESTIFIED TO YOUR STATUS AS A PIMP, AND THE TATTOOS TO YOUR TIME IN THE PENAL INSTITUTIONS OF THE REPUBLIC.

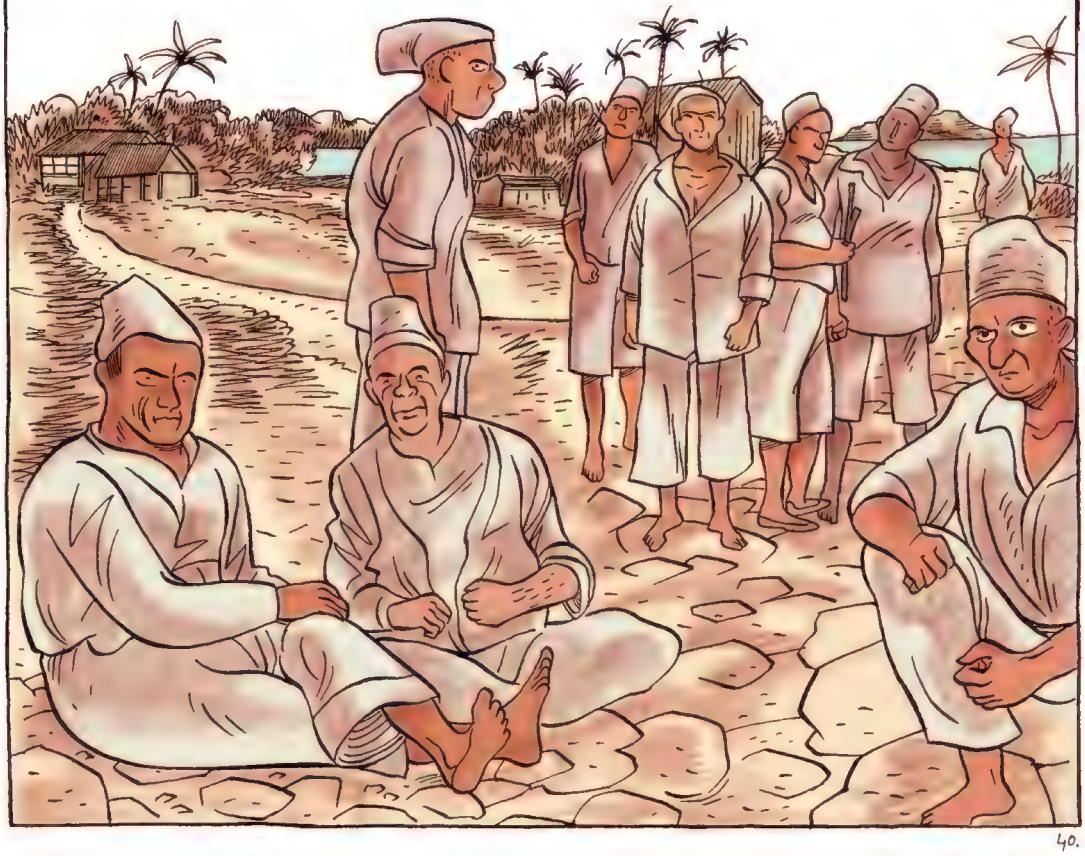



I KNEW THE LAST OF THE BREED.
WHEN I STARTED OUT AS A GUARD IN THE '70S, PRISONS STILL HAD A FEW OLD WARHORSES BACK FROM PENAL COLONIES...
...AND BIRIBI.

BIRIBI WAS AN UMBRELLA TERM FOR ALL THE PENAL INSTITUTIONS THE FRENCH ARMY ESTABLISHED IN 1832 IN ALGERIA, AND THEN LATER MOROCCO AND TUNISIA.

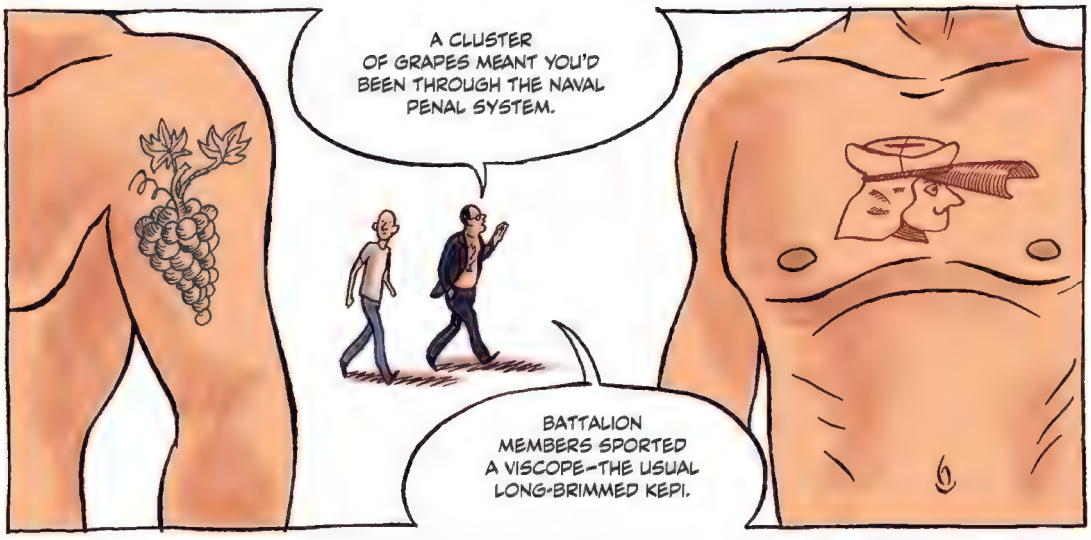
SOLDIERS WITH A CRIMINAL HISTORY, DISCIPLINARY ISSUES, OR A JUVENILE RECORD WOULD GET SENT THERE TO SUFFER THROUGH HARD LABOR AND PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT IN THE HOT SUN. THE SYSTEM CONSISTED OF VARIOUS PUNITIVE GROUPINGS, THE MOST FAMOUS OF WHICH WERE THE BAT'D'AF', OR BATTALIONS OF LIGHT INFANTRY OF AFRICA (BILA), A "REDEMPTIVE COMBAT UNIT" MOSTLY MADE UP OF DRAFTEES WHOSE RECORDS SHOWED PREVIOUS PRISON SENTENCES OF AT LEAST THREE MONTHS.

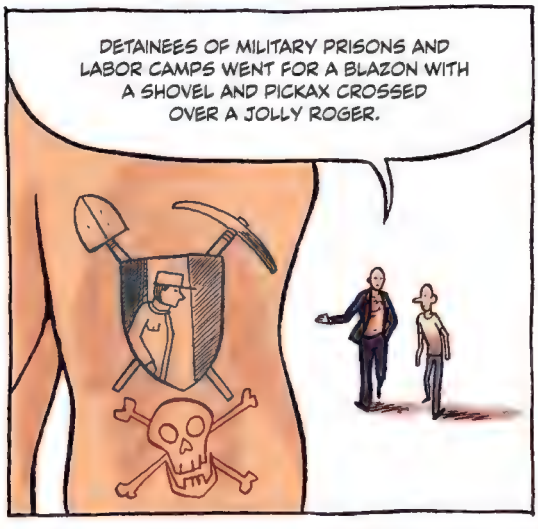
APART FROM THE BAT'D'AF', ANOTHER BIRIBI GROUP WAS THE "COMPANIES OF THE EXCLUDED": CONVICTED DRAFTEES WHO'D BEEN DEEMED UNWORTHY OF CARRYING A WEAPON. THERE WERE ALSO PENAL COMPANIES–RESERVED, AS THEIR NAME SUGGESTS, FOR SOLDIERS WITH DISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS. AND FINALLY, THE MILITARY PRISONS, PENITENTIARIES, AND LABOR CAMPS. THE FIRST TWO WERE FOR SOLDIERS GUILTY OF INFRACTIONS AGAINST CIVILIAN LAW. THE LABOR CAMPS WERE FOR THOSE WHO'D BROKEN MILITARY LAW.

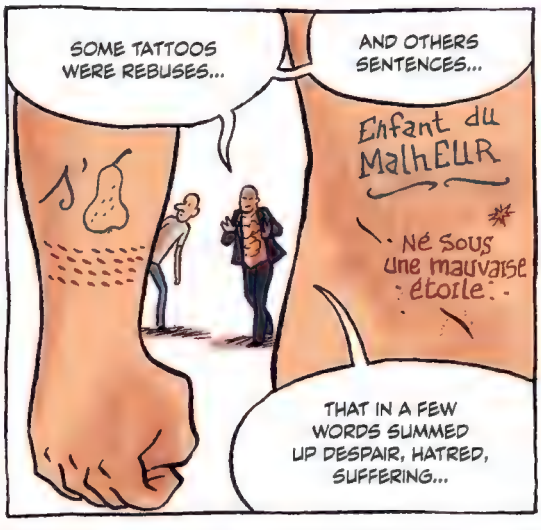


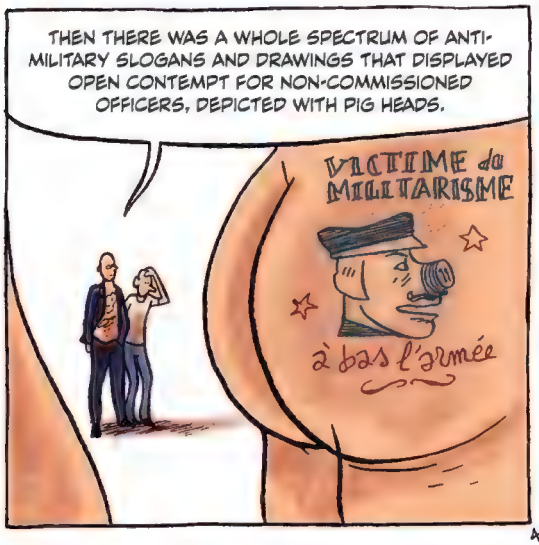
IN THE BIRIBI, TATTOOS WERE VALUED AS A MATTER OF CUSTOM AND TRADITION. MOST EVERYONE GOT THEM. DEPENDING ON THE EXACT ERA, ANYWHERE FROM 70 TO 100% OF THE INMATES WORE TATTOOS.

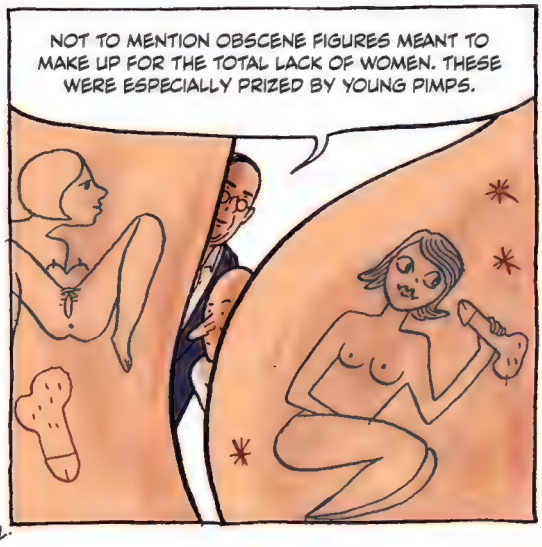
LACASSAGNE, WHO STUDIED MORE THAN 300 TATTOOED BATTALION MEMBERS, CLAIMS TATTOOS WERE SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE THEY WERE THE ONLY WAY OF EXPRESSING IDEAS AND FEELINGS, AND THE LONG PERIODS OF INACTIVITY RESULTING FROM IMPRISONMENT. COPYCATTING AND BOASTFULNESS WERE ALSO REASONS, ESPECIALLY FOR YOUNG GANGSTERS IN UNIFORM, TO COVER ONE'S BODY IN MORE OR LESS SIMILAR OR, AT ANY RATE, LARGELY CODIFIED MOTIFS.

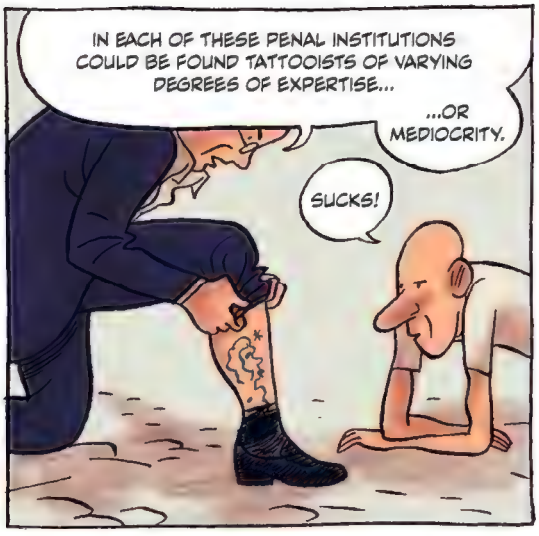

A CLUSTER OF GRAPES MEANT YOU'D BEEN THROUGH THE NAVAL PENAL SYSTEM.
BATTALION MEMBERS SPORTED A VISCOPE—THE USUAL LONG-BRIMMED KEPI.


DETAINEES OF MILITARY PRISONS AND LABOR CAMPS WENT FOR A BLAZON WITH A SHOVEL AND PICKAX CROSSED OVER A JOLLY ROGER.

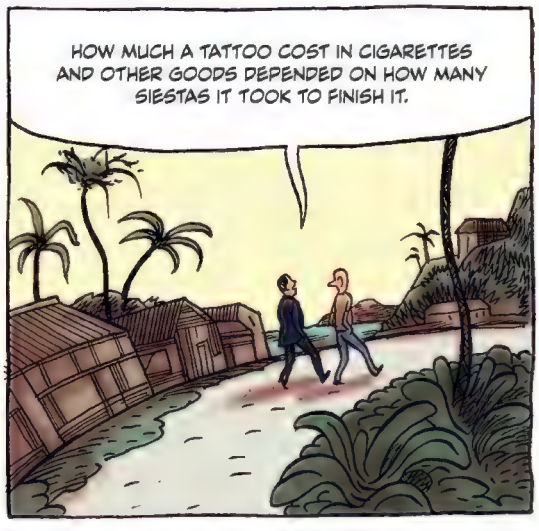

SOME TATTOOS WERE REBUSES...
AND OTHERS SENTENCES...
J'
Enfant du MalhEUR
Né sous une mauvaise étoile
THAT IN A FEW WORDS SUMMED UP DESPAIR, HATRED, SUFFERING...


THEN THERE WAS A WHOLE SPECTRUM OF ANTI-MILITARY SLOGANS AND DRAWINGS THAT DISPLAYED OPEN CONTEMPT FOR NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS, DEPICTED WITH PIG HEADS.
VICTIME du MILITARISME
à bas l'armée

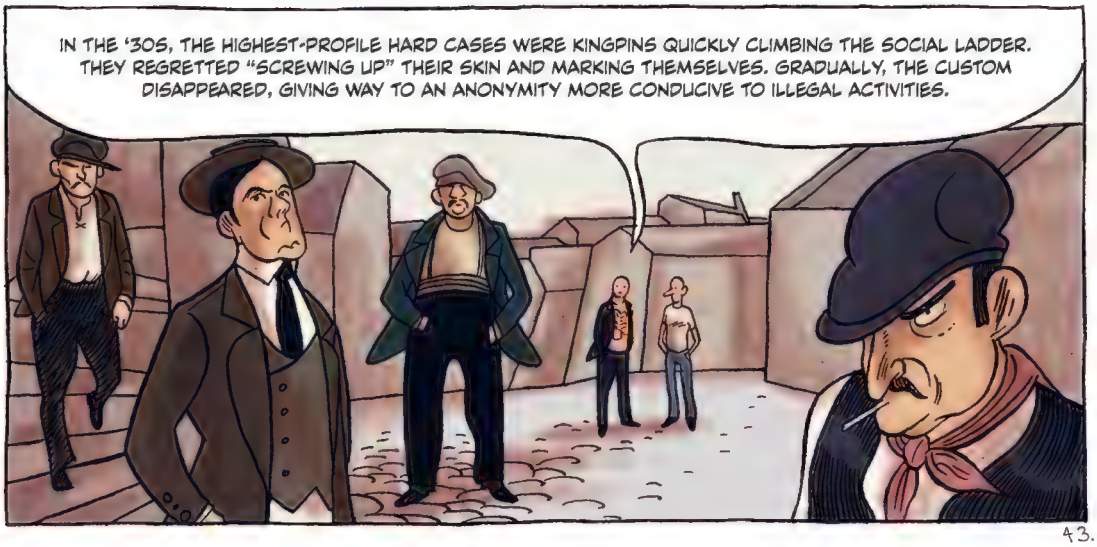

NOT TO MENTION OBSCENE FIGURES MEANT TO MAKE UP FOR THE TOTAL LACK OF WOMEN. THESE WERE ESPECIALLY PRIZED BY YOUNG PIMPS.


IN EACH OF THESE PENAL INSTITUTIONS COULD BE FOUND TATTOOISTS OF VARYING DEGREES OF EXPERTISE...
...OR MEDIOCRITY.
SUCKS!

THEY GAUGED "BILLABLE" HOURS BY THE NUMBER OF NAPS THAT GAVE THEM SOME RESPITE FROM THE HOTTEST TIME OF DAY.

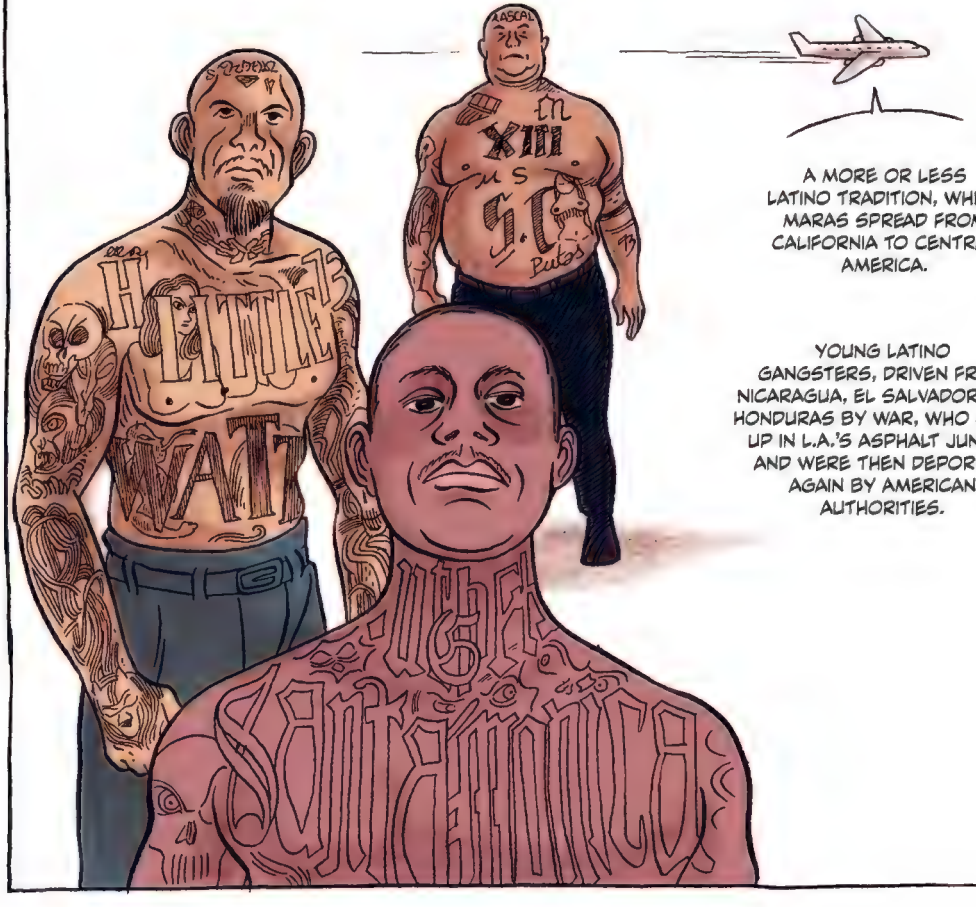

HOW MUCH A TATTOO COST IN CIGARETTES AND OTHER GOODS DEPENDED ON HOW MANY SIESTAS IT TOOK TO FINISH IT.

ONCE A GANGSTER HAD HIS "UNIFORM" FINISHED OFF IN THE BAT'D'AF, HE WAS FREE TO MAKE HIS START IN LIFE.
PARIS
GUERINEAU
ROBINETTERIE
LEDONC
MATELAS
BACK IN THE STREETS—IN THE UNDERWORLD, OR "LA PÈGRE," WHICH AFTER WORLD WAR I CAME TO BE KNOWN AS THE "MILIEU."


IN THE '30S, THE HIGHEST-PROFILE HARD CASES WERE KINGPINS QUICKLY CLIMBING THE SOCIAL LADDER. THEY REGRETTED "SCREWING UP" THEIR SKIN AND MARKING THEMSELVES. GRADUALLY, THE CUSTOM DISAPPEARED, GIVING WAY TO AN ANONYMITY MORE CONDUCIVE TO ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES.

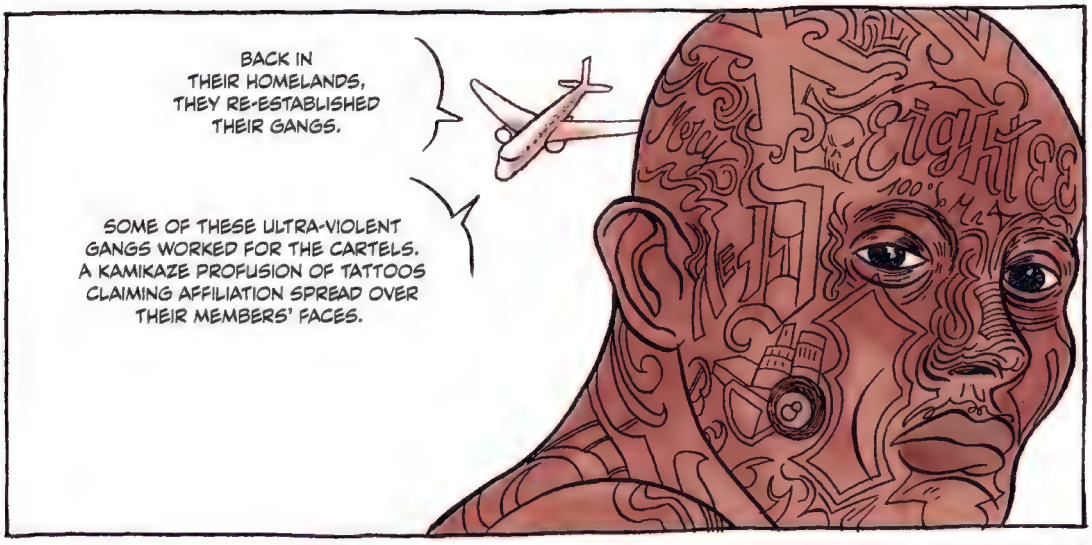
THE SAME THING HAPPENED OVERSEAS. ONLY A FEW CRIMINAL GANGS AROUND THE WORLD STILL USE TATTOOS. YOUTHFUL SINS...
ESPECIALLY SINCE THEIR TATTOOS ARE MOSTLY DECLARATIONS OF BELONGING.

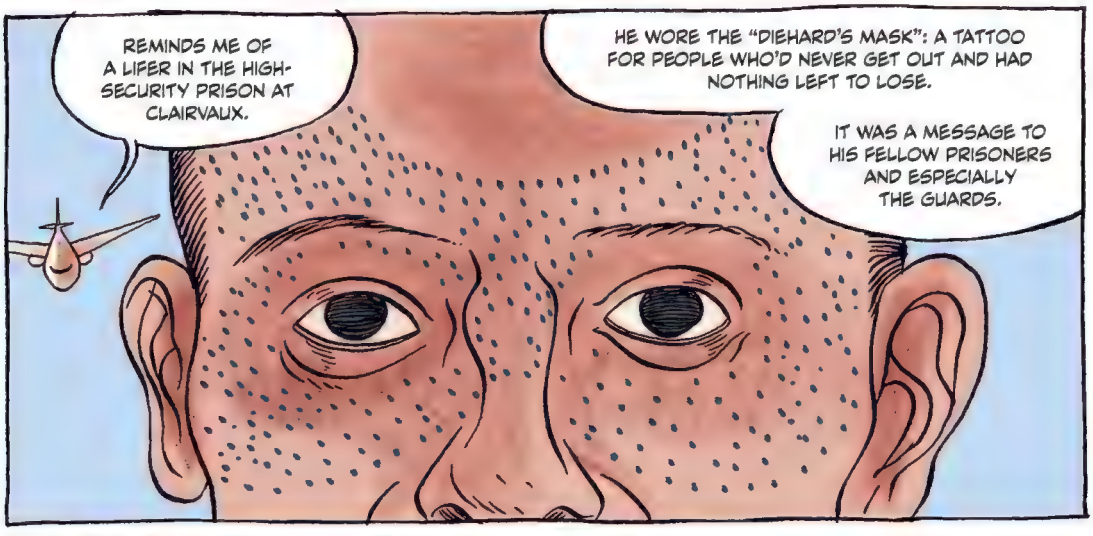
THE BEST KNOWN MAY BE FOUND IN LOS ANGELES. THE GANGS THAT CONTROL THE STREETS OF EAST L.A. HAVE ADOPTED THE STYLE OF CALIFORNIAN CONVICTS: "FINE LINE" BLACK AND GRAY TATTOOS, LIKE THE PRISON TATS MADE WITH SHARPENED GUITAR STRINGS.



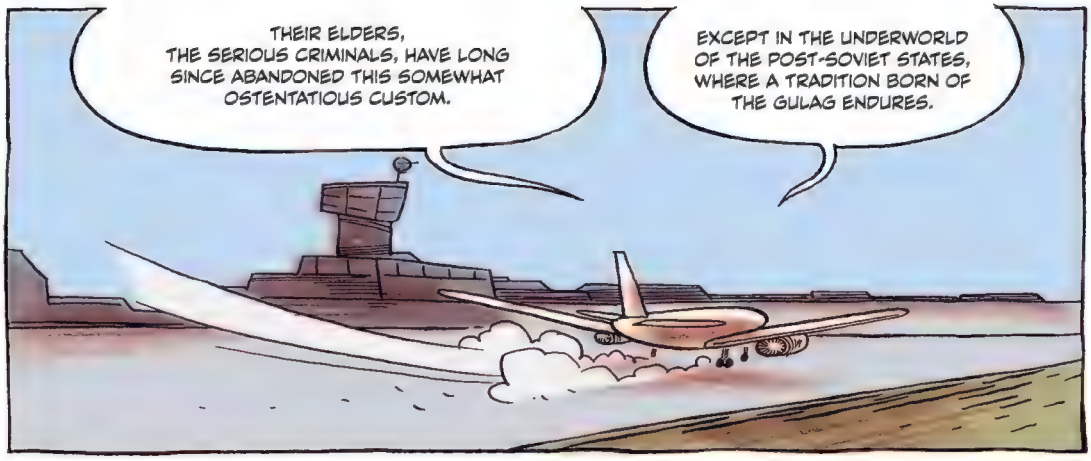
A MORE OR LESS LATINO TRADITION, WHICH MARAS SPREAD FROM CALIFORNIA TO CENTRAL AMERICA.

YOUNG LATINO GANGSTERS, DRIVEN FROM NICARAGUA, EL SALVADOR, AND HONDURAS BY WAR, WHO GREW UP IN L.A.'S ASPHALT JUNGLE AND WERE THEN DEPORTED AGAIN BY AMERICAN AUTHORITIES.

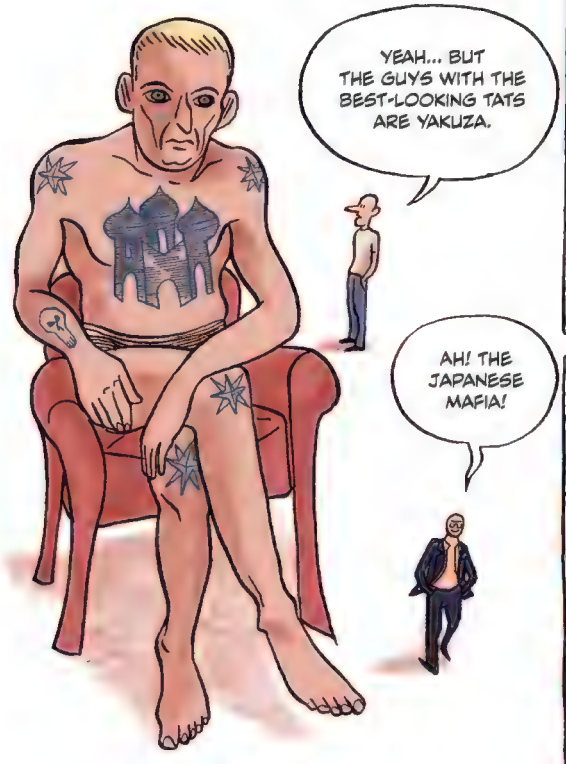

BACK IN THEIR HOMELANDS, THEY RE-ESTABLISHED THEIR GANGS.
SOME OF THESE ULTRA-VIOLENT GANGS WORKED FOR THE CARTELS. A KAMIKAZE PROFUSION OF TATTOOS CLAIMING AFFILIATION SPREAD OVER THEIR MEMBERS' FACES.


REMINDS ME OF A LIFER IN THE HIGH-SECURITY PRISON AT CLAIRVAUX.
HE WORE THE "DIEHARD'S MASK": A TATTOO FOR PEOPLE WHO'D NEVER GET OUT AND HAD NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE.
IT WAS A MESSAGE TO HIS FELLOW PRISONERS AND ESPECIALLY THE GUARDS.

THE YOUNG SOLDIERS OF CENTRAL AMERICA AREN'T THE ONLY ONES TO COPY CALIFORNIAN MODELS. THERE'S ALSO THE NUMBERS GANG IN SOUTH AFRICA, BORN IN PRISONS, JUST LIKE THE GANGS IN MANILA, IN THE PHILIPPINES, AND GANGS IN HONG KONG THAT ARE A GATEWAY TO THE CHINESE MAFIA, THE TRIADS.
NOT TO MENTION THE MAORI BIKERS OF AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND.

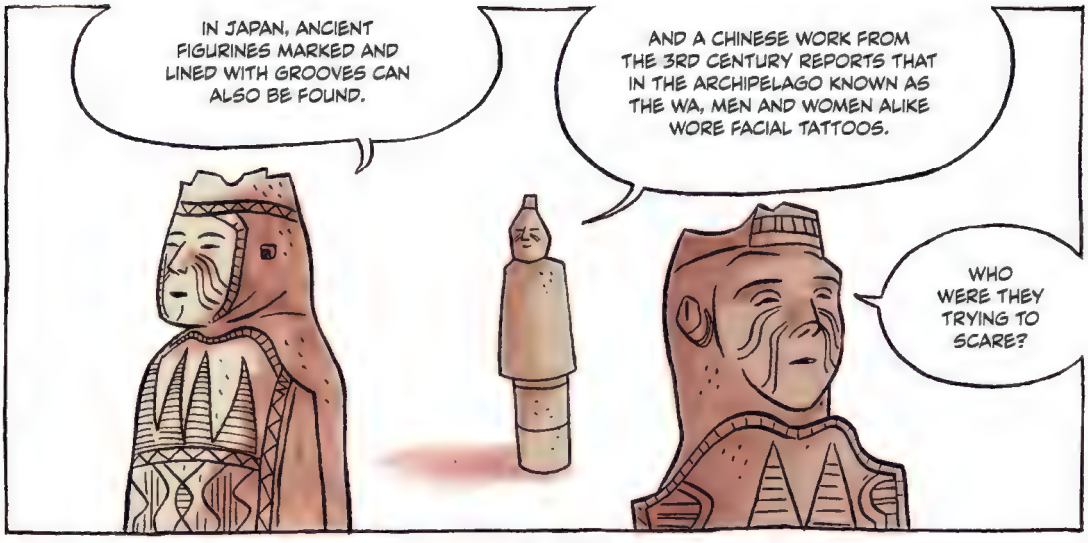

THEIR ELDERS, THE SERIOUS CRIMINALS, HAVE LONG SINCE ABANDONED THIS SOMEWHAT OSTENTATIOUS CUSTOM.
EXCEPT IN THE UNDERWORLD OF THE POST-SOVIET STATES, WHERE A TRADITION BORN OF THE GULAG ENDURES.

THE HIGHER-UPS OR VORY V ZAKONE (LITERALLY, "THIEVES-IN-LAW," A KIND OF JUSTICE OF THE PEACE) SHOW THEIR RANK WITH THE EIGHT-POINTED STAR ON THEIR KNEES OR SHOULDERS. THE NUMBER OF ONION DOMES IN A TATTOO OF AN ORTHODOX CHURCH EQUALS THE NUMBER OF CONVICTIONS.

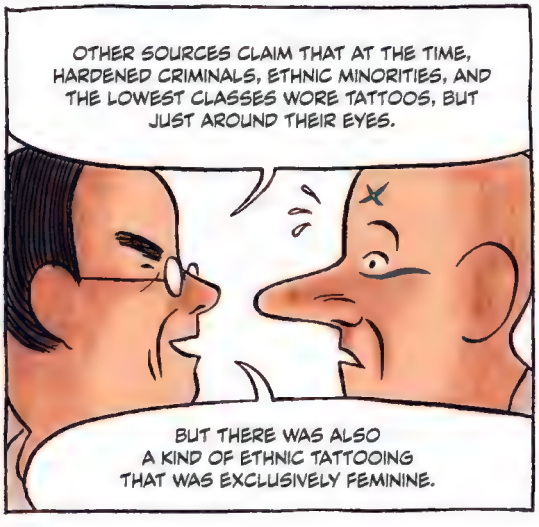


NOW THAT'S HIGH FASHION, A TATTOO SUIT MADE TO ORDER! THEY AREN'T DONE IN JAIL CELLS, THAT'S FOR SURE. THEY'RE THE WORK OF GENUINE ARTISTS, DESCENDED FROM LONG LINES OF MASTER TATTOOISTS.
BUT THOUGH THEY'RE THE BEST KNOWN EXAMPLE, THE YAKUZA DON'T HAVE A MONOPOLY ON IREZUMI* OR HORIMONO**, AS TRADITIONAL TATTOOS ARE CALLED IN JAPAN. EVEN IF THEY'VE NO DOUBT HELPED PERPETUATE THE TRADITION.

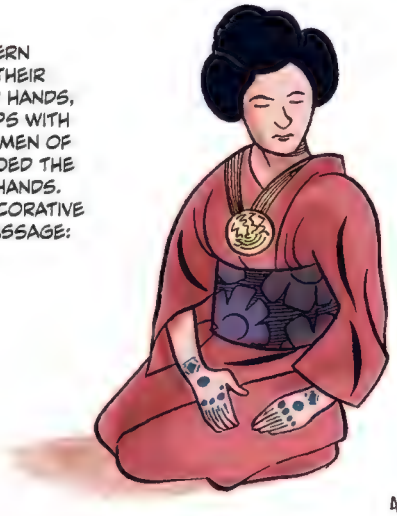
* LIT. "INSERT INK," FIG. "DECORATING THE BODY"
** LIT. "CARVING, ENGRAVING"


IN JAPAN, ANCIENT FIGURINES MARKED AND LINED WITH GROOVES CAN ALSO BE FOUND.
AND A CHINESE WORK FROM THE 3RD CENTURY REPORTS THAT IN THE ARCHIPELAGO KNOWN AS THE WA, MEN AND WOMEN ALIKE WORE FACIAL TATTOOS.
WHO WERE THEY TRYING TO SCARE?

NO ONE. THEY WERE DECORATIVE.
ACTUALLY, NO, YOU'RE RIGHT. AT FIRST, IT WAS A TRICK SHELLFISHERMEN USED TO DEFEND AGAINST SHARK ATTACKS.


OTHER SOURCES CLAIM THAT AT THE TIME, HARDENED CRIMINALS, ETHNIC MINORITIES, AND THE LOWEST CLASSES WORE TATTOOS, BUT JUST AROUND THEIR EYES.
BUT THERE WAS ALSO A KIND OF ETHNIC TATTOOING THAT WAS EXCLUSIVELY FEMININE.

THE WOMEN OF THE NORTHERN ISLE OF HOKKAIDO COVERED THEIR FOREARMS, THE BACKS OF THEIR HANDS, AND THE AREA AROUND THEIR LIPS WITH BROAD RIBBONS OF INK. THE WOMEN OF OKINAWA, TO THE SOUTH, TATTOOED THE BACKS OF THEIR FINGERS AND HANDS. THESE DESIGNS WERE PURELY DECORATIVE AND USED TO MARK RITES OF PASSAGE: PUBERTY, MARRIAGE...



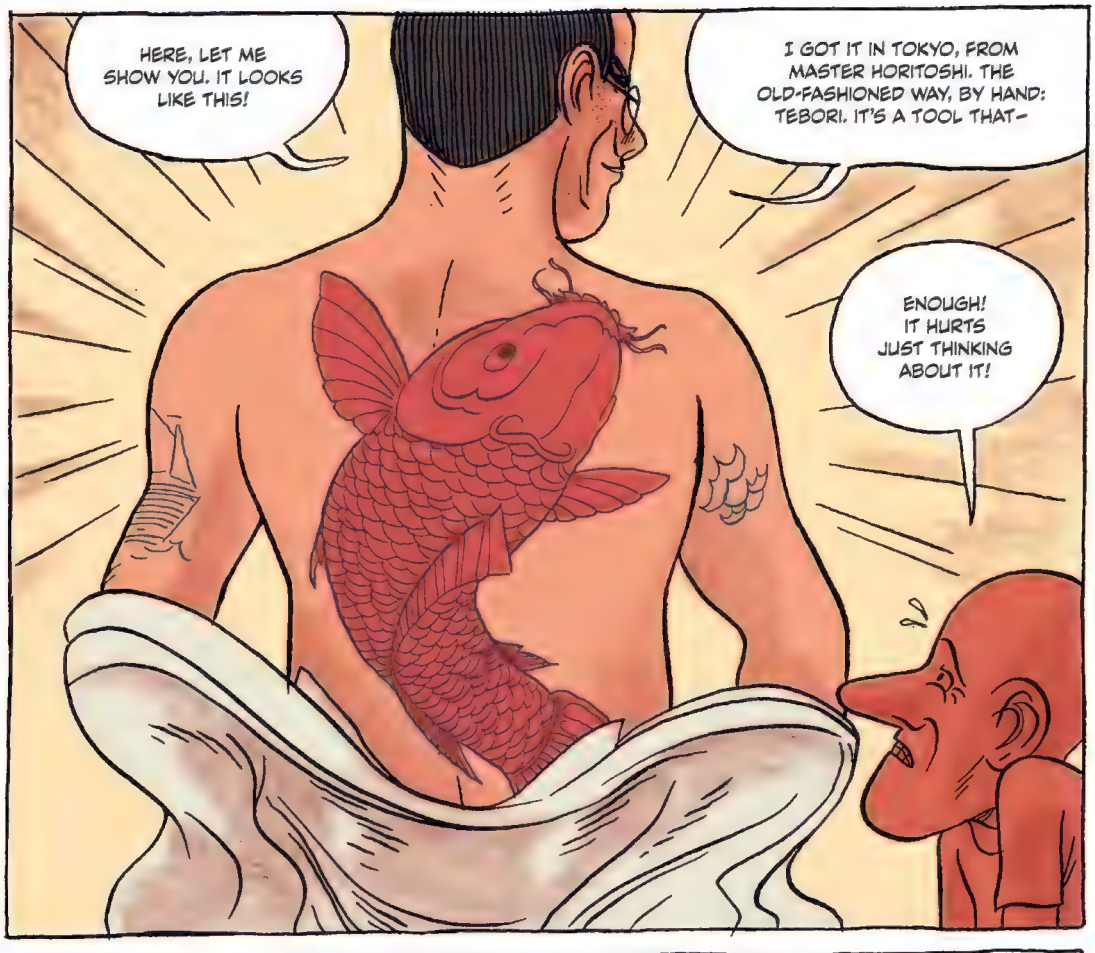
BUT JAPANESE TATTOOING AS WE KNOW IT TODAY DID NOT APPEAR UNTIL MUCH LATER, IN THE EDO PERIOD (1600-1868). AT THE TIME, IT WAS PRACTICED BY COMMONERS AND THE WORKING CLASS OF ANCIENT TOKYO.

FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF PROSTITUTES, WHO PRACTICED IREBOKURO—THE CUSTOM OF INSERTING BEAUTY SPOTS RIGHT WHERE THEIR LOVERS' THUMBS RESTED WHEN HOLDING HANDS—HORSE GROOMS AND CARPENTERS, EVEN FIREMEN, BEGAN TO TATTOO THEMSELVES.

IT STARTED WITH SENTENCES, THEN SCATTERED LITTLE DRAWINGS. THEN, BEGINNING IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 18TH CENTURY, THE DRAWINGS GOT BIGGER, SPREADING ACROSS THE BACK AND TO THE ARMS, UNTIL THEY COVERED THE ENTIRE BODY.

SYMBOLS WERE DRAWN FROM ANIMIST AND TAOIST BESTIARIES: BOARS STOOD FOR TEMERITY, FOXES FOR FERTILITY, MONKEYS FOR WISDOM, TIGERS FOR COURAGE, AND DRAGONS FOR STRENGTH AND POWER.

DRAGONS WERE THE MOST COMMON, ALONG WITH CARP, THE SYMBOL OF COURAGE AND PERSEVERANCE.


HERE, LET ME SHOW YOU. IT LOOKS LIKE THIS!
I GOT IT IN TOKYO, FROM MASTER HORITOSHI. THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY, BY HAND: TEBORI. IT'S A TOOL THAT–
ENOUGH! IT HURTS JUST THINKING ABOUT IT!

OH, C'MON–IT'S JUST A BUNCH OF STEEL NEEDLES AT THE END OF A BAMBOO HANDLE. NO MORE PAINFUL THAN A MACHINE...

THEY GOT ANIMAL TATTOOS, BUT ALSO FLOWERS, AND NOT JUST A ROSE FOR YOUR SWEETHEART. THERE WERE PEONIES, WHICH SYMBOLIZED WEALTH, CHRYSANTHEMUMS WHICH SYMBOLIZED PERFECTION, AND MAPLE LEAVES, WHICH STOOD FOR THE PASSING OF TIME...

IN THE BACKGROUND, TATTOOISTS WOULD PLAY WITH THE ELEMENTS: WATER AND ITS WAVES, FIRE, AIR AND THE WIND, DEPICTED IN WHORLS AND SPIRALS AROUND THE CENTRAL IMAGE.
AND TO TOP IT ALL OFF, BESIDES ANIMALS THERE WERE RELIGIOUS FIGURES FROM BUDDHISM: BUDDHA, OF COURSE, BUT ALSO THE Niō, TWO ANGRY AND MUSCULAR GUARDIANS WHO'D DEVOTED THEIR LIVES TO PROTECTING BUDDHA AND ALWAYS CAME IN PAIRS.
OR FUDŌ, THE GUARDIAN OF HELL. DESPITE HIS FEARSOME APPEARANCE AND HIS WRATHFUL FACE IN FLAMES, HE IS A VERY POPULAR DEITY, AND FUNDAMENTALLY GOOD.
AND WE ALSO SEE FIGURES FROM LEGEND LIKE KINTARO, A LITTLE BOY ALSO KNOWN AS KOITARO*, DEPICTED RIDING A CARP, A SYMBOL OF STRENGTH.

* KOI: "CARP," TARO: "STRONG BOY"

THE 19TH CENTURY SAW TATTOOS BECOME PAINTINGS AND COSTUMES.
THIS IS AN ILLUSTRATION FROM A FAMOUS CHINESE NOVEL, *THE WATER MARGIN* (ALSO A BESTSELLER IN JAPAN) BY THE WOOD-BLOCK PRINT ARTIST UTAGAWA KUNIYOSHI, WHO LAUNCHED THE TREND. IN 1827, HE DEPICTED THE 108 WARRIORS FROM THE NOVEL, THEIR BODIES COVERED IN TATTOOS.
IT WAS A HUGE SUCCESS, AND A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR TATTOOED MEN, WHO TOOK THE NOVEL'S HEROES AS MODELS: A BAND OF ROBIN-HOOD-LIKE THIEVES WHO FOUGHT AGAINST POWER.
PRINTMAKERS WERE USUALLY TATTOO ARTISTS AS WELL. THEY WERE CALLED THE SAME THING: HORISHI. AND AFTER AN INITIAL PERIOD OF COPYING OTHER ARTISTS' WORK, THEY OFFERED UP THEIR OWN COMPOSITIONS.
JAPANESE TATTOOING AS WE KNOW IT WAS BORN.

BUT THE AUTHORITIES DIDN'T CARE FOR IT—TOO IRREVERENT AND ANTISOCIAL FOR THEIR TASTES. STARTING IN 1811, THE SHOGUN'S GOVERNMENT PROMULGATED LAWS TO THWART ITS SPREAD. SOON, IREZUMI WAS PRACTICED ONLY IN SECRET.

NOR DID THE IMPERIAL RESTORATION HELP MATTERS: IN 1872, IT WAS BANNED ENTIRELY.

BUT FOREIGNERS, NEW TO THESE SHORES AND UNAFFECTED BY THE PROHIBITION, WERE FREE TO SUBMIT THEMSELVES TO THE NEEDLES OF MASTER TATTOOISTS, ESPECIALLY AROUND THE PORT OF YOKOHAMA.

DESPITE ITS SHAMEFUL ASSOCIATIONS, TATTOOING WOULD CONTINUE TO DEVELOP IN THE SHADOWS, AND IN 1948, THE AMERICAN OCCUPIERS LIFTED THE BAN.

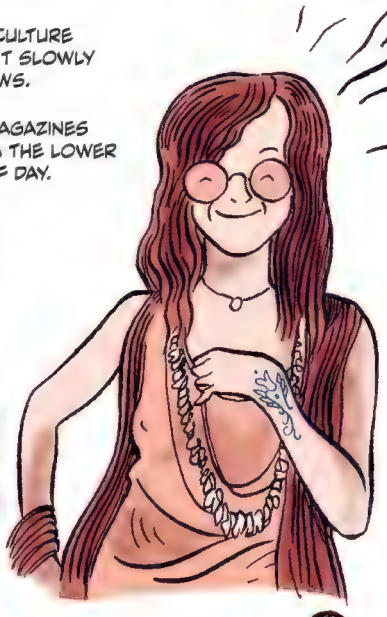
MEANWHILE, THE YAKUZA HAD ADOPTED THE PRACTICE AND POPULARIZED IT ABROAD.

BUT MORE RECENTLY, THEY TOO HAVE REALIZED THE VALUE OF DISCRETION, AND ARE SLOWLY GIVING IT UP. BUT A WORLDWIDE INFATUATION WITH JAPANESE TATTOOING HAS BROUGHT IT BACK AS A POPULAR ART.

THE WORLDWIDE DEMOCRATIZATION OF TATTOOING AS WE KNOW IT TODAY BEGAN IN THE '60S, IN AMERICA.

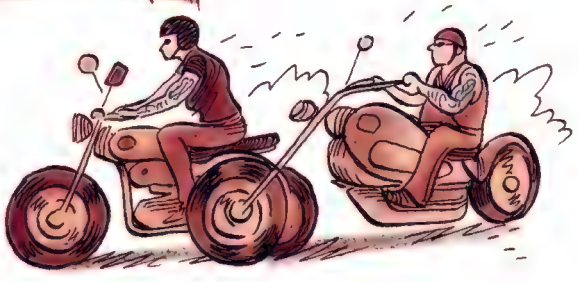
WITH THE RISE OF THE COUNTERCULTURE AND THE ADVENT OF ROCK'N'ROLL, IT SLOWLY EMERGED FROM THE SHADOWS.

SINGERS LIKE JANIS JOPLIN AND MAGAZINES LIKE *ROLLING STONE* YANKED IT FROM THE LOWER DEPTHS AND INTO THE LIGHT OF DAY.

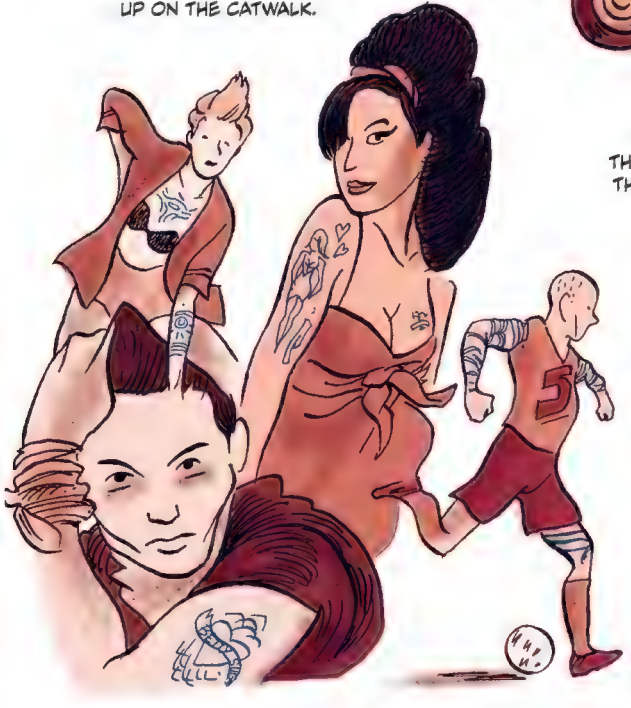


THE RUDE AND THE CRUDE—SAILORS AND GANGSTERS ALIKE—PASSED IT ON TO BIKERS AND ROCKERS, WHO SEIZED UPON IT AS AN EXPRESSION OF REBELLION.

IN THE '80S, URBAN TRIBES WHO PUT A LOT INTO THEIR LOOKS, LIKE PUNKS AND SKINHEADS, MADE IT PART OF THEIR DRESS CODE, AND BROUGHT IT HOME.

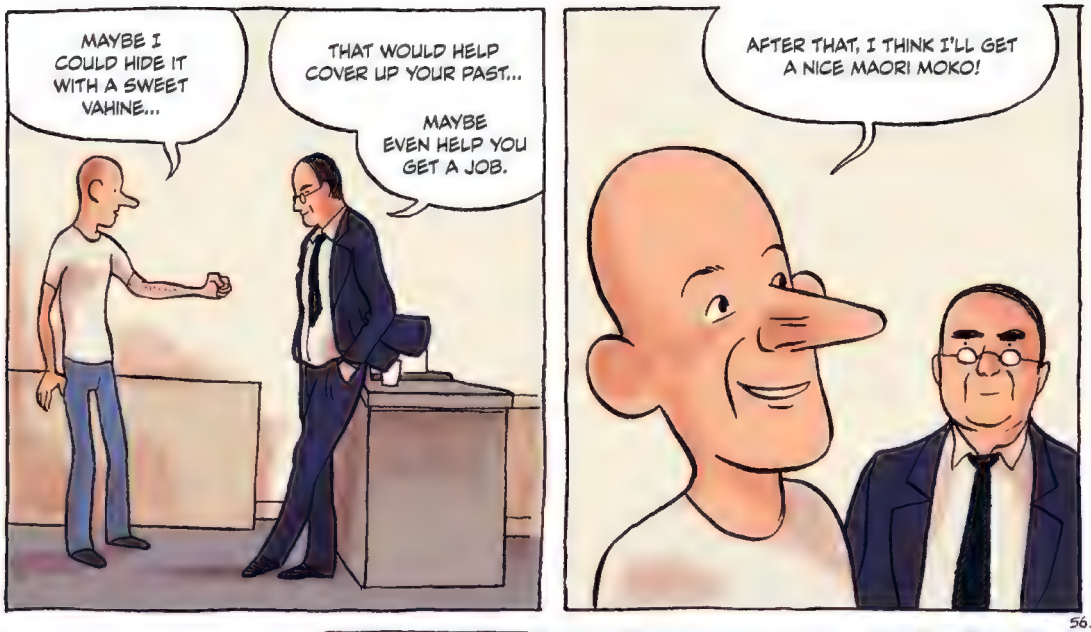


IN THEIR WAKE, FASHION DESIGNERS LIKE VIVIENNE WESTWOOD AND JEAN-PAUL GAULTIER DREW INSPIRATION FROM THE STREETS, PUTTING TATTOOS UP ON THE CATWALK.



MUSICIANS, ATHLETES, AND ACTORS SUBMITTED THEMSELVES TO THE NEEDLE, AND THE EXPLOSION IN MEDIA COVERAGE, BROADCASTING THEIR IMAGES, SLOWLY CHANGED HOW PEOPLE SAW TATTOOS. THEY WEREN'T JUST MARKS OF TRIBAL AFFILIATION ANYMORE.

IT'S TIME YOU CAUGHT UP WITH THE TIMES, YOUNG MAN!
DIGIT NO KOPS
EVEN IF—AND I SHOULDN'T ADMIT THIS—I FIND YOUR SCREWED-UP LITTLE TAT CHARMING.
BUT NO MORE OF THAT, OK?
YOU'LL PROBABLY GET INFECTED, OR CATCH SOMETHING.
AS FOR SOMETHING BETTER-LOOKING, WELL—THAT'LL HAVE TO WAIT TILL YOU'RE FREE.
EIGHTEEN MORE MONTHS...
DIGIT TAX CUTS
YOU CAN GET THAT DATED OLD THING COVERED UP BY A REAL ARTIST.
MEANWHILE, I SURE HAVE ENJOYED YOUR STORIES.


MAYBE I COULD HIDE IT WITH A SWEET VAHINE...
THAT WOULD HELP COVER UP YOUR PAST...
MAYBE EVEN HELP YOU GET A JOB.
AFTER THAT, I THINK I'LL GET A NICE MAORI MOKO!

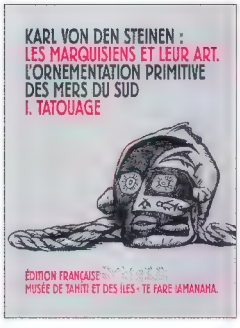
Jérôme PIERRAT et Alfred

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

THREE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM JÉRÔME PIERRAT

Mauvais garçons
[Bad Boys], by Jérôme Pierrat and Eric Guillon (La manufacture de livres, 2013).

A photo gallery of pimps' faces, all "bousillé"—slang for tattooed—from civilian and military prisons across France. Tough guys and hard cases immortalized in court records from the arrests that punctuated their careers.


KARL VON DEN STEINEN :
LES MARQUISIENS ET LEUR ART.
L'ORNEMENTATION PRIMITIVE
DES MERS DU SUD
I. TATOUAGE
ÉDITION FRANÇAISE
MUSÉE DE TAHITI ET DES ÎLES « TE FARE IAMANAHA.

Les Marquisiens et leur art, tome 1 : Tatouage
[The Marquesans and Their Art, Book 1: Tattoos], by Karl von den Steinen (Au Vent des Îles, 2016).

A famous work by a German doctor and anthropologist sent on a mission to the Marquesas Islands in 1897 by the Ethnological Museum of Berlin. Today, his notes and sketches on designs inked by needle on the natives of the archipelago constitute the most significant record of a swiftly disappearing tribal art.

Peau de Brocart : Le corps tatoué au Japon
[Brocaded Skin: Body Art in Japan], by Philippe Pons (Livre Illustré imprint, Le Seuil, 2000).

A short but highly comprehensive work from a specialist on Japan, which goes behind the curtain of Japanese society and the popular art of tattooing, long forbidden and since become the de facto symbol of the Japanese mafia.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

THREE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ALFRED

Night of the Hunter, dir. Charles Laughton (1955).

I was twelve when I saw a still photo of Robert Mitchum with his mythic tattoos from this movie. It looked so cool that for years, I dreamed of getting those famous words, LOVE and HATE, tattooed on my fingers just like him. Then, later, I saw the film and realized his character was a real shitheel, not cool at all, and I let that idea drop. But the film remains a true masterpiece!

Hey!, magazine from Ankama's Label 619 imprint, in publication since 2010.

A graphic design revue, lively and absolutely wonderful, that explores the visual world of tattoos. Not only that, but founders Anne and Julien were behind the major exhibit "Tatoueurs, tatoués" [The Tattooers and the Tattooed] held at the Musée du quai Branly from May 6, 2014 to October 18, 2015.

Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia, Vols. 1-3, by Danzig Baldaev and Sergei Vasiliev (Fuel Publishing, 2009).

Danzig Baldaev spent his life visiting prisons, hospitals, and morgues in Russia to collect, inventory, annotate, and decipher the tattoos of Soviet prisoners. Decorative, ethnic, religious, political, sexual... an entire language unto itself, often highly coded, through thousands of incredible drawings and photos.

THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD IN

THESE *LITTLE BOOKS OF KNOWLEDGE*

THE LITTLE BOOK
OF KNOWLEDGE:
TATTOOS

THE LITTLE BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE:
TATTOOS

The Little Book of Knowledge series has everything you could want to know about your favorite subjects written by experts in the field and drawn by fans who know the material. Each *Little Book* is perfect for the established enthusiast and burgeoning amateur alike.

Never before has the tattoo been spread across the various strata of society with such enthusiasm. In just a few decades this practice dating from the Neolithic period has become a globalized phenomenon. Now, retrace the history of the tattoo and its role in fashion, societal standing, and aesthetics.

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